

A Companion to the Etruscans

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A COMPANION TO THE
ETRUSCANS

EDITED BY SINCLAIR BELL
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Sinclair Bell and Alexandra A. Carpino
Chicago, Illinois, and Flagstaff, Arizona
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Map of Etruria



Map 1 Map of Etruria. Drawing: De Puma 2013; Map 1. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Introduction

Alexandra A. Carpino and Sinclair Bell

The concept of an “Etruscan world” isolated, intrusive and virtually antithetic to an “Italic world” is rapidly becoming a myth.

Massimo Pallottino (Pallottino 1975: 237)

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, there has not only been a rising interest in Etruscan art and archaeology in the United States but also a desire to present these important pre-Roman peoples as they were in antiquity: a vibrant, independent people whose distinct civilization flourished in central Italy for most of the first millennium BCE and whose influences were felt throughout the Mediterranean, from the Black Sea to the Strait of Gibraltar. At the root of this interest is the conviction, eloquently stated by the late David Ridgway, that “Treated in its own right and on its own terms, the archaeological, architectural, artistic, historical, political and religious record of the largely autonomous Etruscan cities is indispensable to the proper understanding of the Mediterranean and Classical worlds: and of ancient Europe, too” (Ridgway 2010 : 49–50).

One of the first signs of this shift in North America came in 2003 when the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology completed a decade-long gallery renovation project which emphasized both the artistic and thematic connections between the Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans. Not only did its new Kyle M. Phillips Etruscan Gallery contain numerous artifacts never previously exhibited at the museum but – taken as a whole – they set a new standard for curation and display: their organization highlights both artistic and thematic connections with works on display in the neighboring spaces devoted to the Greeks and the Romans. Thus, this comprehensive exhibition allowed its visitors multiple opportunities to explore the Etruscans’ rich artistic heritage, to draw connections with artifacts from other parts of the Mediterranean, and in this way to understand better its lasting legacy to Western culture. The accompanying catalogue, published two years later (Turfa 2005), also marked what Nancy T. de Grummond has

called “a new stage in American research on the antiquities of Italy”: its essays provided essential background on the cultural and artistic contexts of Etruscan art (topics include technology and commerce, the art of worship, daily life, and Etruria’s final days), while the lavishly illustrated entries included comprehensive analyses and commentaries.

Not long thereafter, in 2007, over 550 works of art in the Etruscan collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York were reinstalled in a permanent gallery whose goal was to provide the institution’s visitors with a wide-ranging overview of Italy’s most important pre-Roman culture. In addition, 150 Etruscan artifacts were added to the museum’s Study Collection gallery. Many of these works of art were also recently published in a comprehensive catalogue (De Puma 2013) that incorporates the most up-to-date research on the Etruscans and significantly enhances our knowledge about their culture.

In addition to these projects at two of the most important museums in the United States (see further, Chapter 31 for a complete list of collections with significant Etruscan art holdings), single exhibitions such as *From the Temple to the Tomb: Etruscan Treasures from Tuscany*, on display at the Meadows Museum at SMU (Dallas) in 2009 (Warden 2008), and *The Chimaera of Arezzo*, held at the J. Paul Getty Museum between July 2009 and February 2010 (Iozzo 2009, with the important review by Warden 2011), provided additional opportunities for the American public to see, first-hand, a broad range of Etruscan material culture from a European collection organized and displayed, once again, so as to emphasize its distinctive artistic characteristics, its original contexts, and its relationships to the wider Mediterranean world.

Of course, there have long been indicators of this movement outside of North America, especially in Italy, where landmark as well as more recent exhibitions (e.g., Torelli 2001 ; Cianferoni and Celuzza 2010 ; Beltramo Ceppi Zevi and Restellini 2011 ; Mandolesi and Sannibale 2012 ; Gaultier et al. 2013) and significant publications (e.g., by G. Camporeale and G. Colonna, among many others) have continually revitalized the field of Etruscology while also giving the Etruscans a wider, popular audience. Some important, recent changes elsewhere in Europe signal movement in a similarly positive direction. The creation of the first formal position for the teaching of Etruscan art – the Sybille Haynes Lectureship in Etruscan and Italic Archaeology and Art at the University of Oxford – fulfills a longstanding need in the discipline, one forcefully advocated by David Ridgway (2010) in an essay published shortly before the appointment’s announcement. In addition, publications of important European collections continue to appear, such as that in Berlin (Kästner 2013), the Louvre (Bruschetti 2011) and Palermo (Villa 2012).

This *Companion to the Etruscans* capitalizes on this ongoing interest in the Etruscans in the English-speaking world by bringing together both well-

established and emerging scholars whose chapters present fresh perspectives on Etruscan art and culture, ones that call attention, in particular, to recent discoveries, new theoretical approaches, and reassessments of long-standing misconceptions and/or beliefs. Traditional topics such as architecture, wall paintings, textiles, ceramics, and sculpture, along with those that have not been addressed elsewhere, appear as the most up-to-date research is analyzed and examined anew. Assessments that denigrate the Etruscans as mysterious, eccentric, and culturally inferior to the Greeks and the Romans have been set aside, and their appropriation of a wide variety of foreign customs, artistic styles, and literary themes is reconsidered from perspectives that emphasize agency and reception rather than a deficit of local creativity. Regional artistic and cultural diversity within Etruria itself – the product of its independent urban centers – is also discussed in depth, as are the ancient literary sources that mention the Etruscans. The latter are treated critically in three different chapters whose authors demonstrate that the ancient texts reflect more on the values and ideals of Greco-Roman society than provide accurate information about the Etruscans. Finally, the Etruscans’ heritage and legacies are fully acknowledged, especially with respect to technical and artistic innovations that appear first in Etruria before becoming widespread in other parts of the ancient Mediterranean.

2. Contents

The volume is divided into five parts – I. History; II. Geography, Urbanization, and Space; III. Evidence in Context; IV. Art, Society, and Culture; and V. The Etruscan Legacy and Contemporary Issues. This format that allows readers to become familiar with the key themes, approaches, and issues that underlie the study of the Etruscans today. A comprehensive list of references and a Guide to Further Reading accompany each chapter, while an appendix that details the Etruscan art found in North American museums appears at the end of the book.

In [Part I](#): History, Simon Stoddart (“Beginnings: Protovillanovan and Villanovan Etruria”) provides an overview of the evidence that indicates that the origins of the material culture later described as Etruscan can be found throughout the phases of the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age. His chapter is followed by Skylar Neil’s “Materializing the Etruscans: The Expression and Negotiation of Identity during the Orientalizing, Archaic, and Classical periods.” Using a contextual approach and a theoretical framework that counters the anachronistic biases found in the ancient literary sources, Neil provides new insights into the Etruscans’ history and culture over four centuries of significant transformation. The section concludes with Letizia

Ceccarelli's discussion of the Romanization of Etruria from the perspective of both the colonizers and those who were colonized. After discussing Roman strategies with respect to road construction, the founding of colonies, and the creation of alliances with members of the ruling Etruscan elite, she focuses on how the latter's religious and funerary architecture manifests the process of Romanization.

In [Part II: Geography, Urbanization, and Space](#), readers are provided with an overview of the key aspects of material culture that gave the Etruscans their distinctive identity and contributed to their ability to thrive both in central Italy and throughout much of the Mediterranean for nearly a millennium. In "Etruscan Italy: Physical Geography and Environment," Simon Stoddart demonstrates how the Etruscans' unique landscape allowed for the growth of regionally diverse urban and rural centers that specialized in maritime or fluvial transport, agriculture, and metallurgy, depending on their locations. Next, in "City and Countryside," he discusses the relationship between rural and nucleated landscapes and how these related to each other from the Orientalizing period onward. Giovannangelo Camporeale then provides a still-broader perspective on ecologies and networks in his chapter "The Etruscans and the Mediterranean." Noting that "the sea in general and the Mediterranean in particular did not impose a boundary on the Etruscans," he discusses how trade contributed to radical changes in artistic production, literacy, urban organization, and lifestyle. Corinna Riva delves more deeply into the question of Etruscan urbanization in her chapter, "Urbanization and Foundation Rites: The Material Culture of Rituals at the Heart and the Margins of Etruscan Early Cities." She questions the past reliance of scholars on the foundation acts and events recorded by later Roman textual sources, arguing that they are more appropriate for considerations about the foundation of Roman colonies than for the Etruscans. Instead, she argues for the primacy of archaeological data, which – when treated on their own terms – allow for a much richer and more complex understanding of the earliest phases of urbanization and their connections to longstanding political and ritual processes. In "Poggio Civitate: Community Form in Inland Etruria," Anthony Tuck discusses a site that flourished from the late stages of the Iron Age through the middle of the Archaic period. The subject of excavations for the past 60 years, Poggio Civitate stands as the aristocratic center of an inland Etruscan community whose innovative technologies, trade contacts, architectural designs, and decorative schemes continue to change our perceptions of early urbanization and elite ideologies in Etruria. Claudio Bizzarri then presents an overview of benchmark sites and current excavations in southern and inner Etruria. The work of a number of international teams have, over the past few decades, significantly furthered our understanding of the Etruscans' life, culture, and contributions at sites such as Tarquinia, Orvieto, and Cerveteri.

Domestic space, along with the water management technologies and engineering acumen that distinguished the Etruscans from all other cultures on the Italian peninsula during their heyday, serve as the themes analyzed by Claudio Bizzarri and David Soren in [Chapter 10](#). The authors consider how the Etruscans syncretized or blended technology from other Mediterranean cultures and then adapted it to meet their own specific ritual and physical requirements. [Chapter 11](#) addresses the topic of funerary architecture. In “Rock Tombs and the World of Etruscan *Necropoleis*: Recent Discoveries, Research, and Interpretations,” Stephan Steingraber traces the origin, typology, and distribution of a tomb type without parallel in the rest of Italy, arguing that the arrangement and organization of the larger rock tomb *necropoleis* were “not accidental but an expression of an intended rational use of space and of new urbanistic tendencies.” By situating their elaborate facades toward cities, these tombs not only established “a permanent visual link between the area of the living and the area of the dead,” but also allowed their owners and their families “to stand out in public and permanently recall themselves to the minds of their descendants.” Sacred space, along with the performance of religious rituals that reinforced the hierarchies of the Etruscan social landscape, are the topics of the chapter that concludes [Part II](#), P. Gregory Warden’s “Communicating with the Gods: Sacred Space in Etruria.” By foregrounding ritual in his discussion of the designs of sacred space as well as of temples and altars, Warden demonstrates the intricate connections between Etruria’s theocratic elite and the physical loci of their religiosity.

[Part III](#) centers on the theme of “Evidence in Context.” It begins with a debate that has been going on since ancient times: the question of the Etruscans’ origins. In his chapter, “Etruscan Skeletal Biology and Etruscan Origins,” Marshall Becker demonstrates that modern DNA studies cannot be relied upon to provide a definitive answer to this question, given the genetic diversity of their population and the dearth of high-quality skeletal material available for analysis. He also summarizes data from a group of skeletons from Tarquinia which not only aid our knowledge of Etruscan biology but also provide a better understanding of the burial customs this urban center designated for the remains of men, women, and children, customs that offer insights into household dynamics and social organization in southern Etruria. Rex Wallace tackles the Etruscans’ spoken and written language, one that cannot be correlated with any of their Italic neighbors, in [Chapter 14](#), “Language, Alphabet, and Linguistic Affiliation.” New excavations, along with the rigorous scientific study of Etruscan words, inscriptions, and linguistic structure, continue to reveal information that not only helps to solve longstanding grammatical issues but also creates new ones that fuel the direction of future research.

The next five chapters consider various art forms in context: bucchero, textiles, wall paintings, votives, and jewelry. In “Bucchero in Context,” Philip

Perkins incorporates the framework of the “life cycle” in order to place the Etruscans’ most distinctive and original class of ceramic production into its historical and cultural milieu and suggest avenues for future research. Margarita Gleba discusses the relatively new field of textile archaeology in Etruria in her chapter; she not only considers the important data that new scientific methods have generated with respect to issues as varied as chronology and provenance, but also the domestic, commercial, and ritual importance of textile production and what this tells us about women’s contributions to their families and communities. Specialization of a different sort is the subject of [Chapter 17](#), “Etruscan Wall Painting: Insights, Innovation and Legacy.” By highlighting the various advances in technique, style, and subject matter that originate in Etruria rather than Greece and which thereby became part of their legacy to Rome, Lisa Pieraccini reconsiders both the theme of artistic creativity and the role Etruria played as a pioneer in this field. This chapter not only addresses the imbalance in the scholarship on ancient Italic wall painting but it also emphasizes the evidence that provides a better understanding of the Etrusco-Roman artistic relationship. Helen Nagy then treats a single category of object – the votive – that, in highly significant ways, bears witness to the well-known religiosity of the Etruscans. She highlights the numinous powers inherent in what are often humble objects and argues that it is “evident that for the Etruscans once an object was placed in a sacred context, it was considered to be divinely imbued and had to be offered the rituals proper to its disposition.” Jewelry is the final art form analyzed in depth in this section. Alexis Castor considers its use by men, women, and children, concentrating on the personal and public identities conveyed by their materials, scale, and forms. Attention to these aspects reveals the various cultural layers embedded in accessories that not only had both material and symbolic value but which also marked different life stages.

The final three chapters in [Part III](#) treat the ancient literary sources that include references to the Etruscans and their culture. In “*Luxuria prolapse est: Etruscan Wealth and Decadence*,” Hilary Becker dissects two *topoi* which many Greek and Roman authors described as particularly “Etruscan” but which, after careful consideration, reveal more about Greco-Roman culture and upper class fears about behaviors and traits deemed both undesirable and unacceptable. Becker argues that the very construction and promotion of *topoi* about the Etruscans’ excessive wealth and decadence functioned as deliberate distortions designed to reinforce Greco-Roman – not Etruscan – standards and realities. This chapter is followed by Gretchen Meyers’s “Tanaquil: The Conception and Construction of an Etruscan Matron.” Here, the author examines the literary sources that discuss this well-known Etruscan queen, looking both at how she gained her Roman identity and how it relates both to her Etruscan one as well as aspects of real Etruscan women’s lives (specifically with respect to the production of ceremonial textiles). Her nuanced reassessment of Tanaquil’s textile production and its different

meanings through time provide new evidence about the identity and activities of elite Etruscan women. The section concludes with Jean MacIntosh Turfa's, "The *Obesus Etruscus*: Can the Trope be True?" Turfa considers another well-known Roman literary convention – that of the overweight and self-indulgent Etruscan – in comparison to archaeological and artistic data. She argues that the health, behavior, and appearance of the majority of the members of their society have very little to do with a characterization invented long after the Etruscans' heyday.

Part IV: Art, Society, and Culture begins with Ann Gunter's analysis of the Etruscans' relationship to both Greek art and the Near East during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. She argues that internal social and political changes in Etruria – rather than external forces – provided the stimulus for the Etruscan elites' artistic and cultural interaction with the eastern Mediterranean. These factors, in turn, resulted in an influx of foreign styles, imagery, and cultural practices that were incorporated into indigenous traditions and generated new forms of visual and material expression. In **Chapter 24**, "Etruscan Artists," Jocelyn Penny Small then counters past – mainly Hellenic – views that have failed to acknowledge the creativity and technical skills of the anonymous individuals who produced works as varied as gold jewelry with intricate granulation or large scale terracotta sculptures. She argues that it is critical for scholars to acknowledge, once and for all, "that the aim of art need not be limited to the imitation of nature, as the Greeks and the Romans believed, but that [it] can also be abstract, to name just one characteristic." The Etruscans' reception of a Greek stylistic form is the theme of Francesco de Angelis's study of Etruscan bodies and Greek ponderation. He considers how the various regions of Etruria responded to a particular stylistic element – ponderation – and argues that its use was both "immediate and sensorial – [rather than] naive or unsophisticated," as well as intricately tied to the Etruscans' sense of self. When understood as a fluid corporeal "costume," one which different characters could display depending on the persona they were meant to convey, ponderation becomes a motif that allows scholars to gain a deeper and more complex understanding about the reception of Classical Greek art in Etruria.

Iconographic themes underlie Ingrid Krauskopf's discussion of myth in Etruria. The author focuses both on why the Etruscans first incorporated certain stories of Greek origin into their own practices and then on how these became an integral part of Etruscan culture. **Part IV** concludes with a reassessment of the different uses of violent imagery in Etruria in contexts as varied as the sanctuary, the tomb, and the home. In "The 'Taste' for Violence in Etruscan Art: Debunking the Myth," Alexandra Carpino argues that a small number of Greek stories were exploited deliberately not because the Etruscans had a taste for violence and its depiction, but because these particular subjects resonated both emotionally and psychologically with Etruscans of all ages

while also effectively communicating specific beliefs, values, and anxieties about human behavior and passions. She also points out that these images are in the minority in terms of the overall corpus of subjects found on domestic artifacts, indicating, above all, that their selection was both thoughtful and deliberate and not symptomatic of an appetite for bloody or horrific imagery.

The volume concludes with [Part V](#), “The Etruscan Legacy and Contemporary Issues.” Ingrid Rowland discusses the beginning of Etruscan Studies in her analysis of the life and times of Giovanni Nanni, a Dominican friar in late fifteenth-century Italy whose books, authored under the pseudonym Annius of Viterbo, helped lay the groundwork for the discipline. Despite providing the Etruscans with a false history – one that traced their first king back to Noah – Annius remains a pioneering figure in the study of this important Italic culture, one whose story allows us to understand better the first Etruscan revival and its impact on the art and architecture of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy.

Richard De Puma expounds further on actual Etruscan forgeries in his chapter, “Tyrrhenian Sirens: The Seductive Song of Etruscan Forgeries.” He focuses both on the motivations for their manufacture and how certain well-known examples – e.g., the large terracotta sculptures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York – have colored our perceptions of the Etruscans. In addition, he discusses the range of scientific methods that can be used to distinguish an authentic artifact from a fake. [Part V](#) concludes with Gordon Lobay’s chapter, “Looting and the Antiquities Trade,” an up-to-date survey of the many issues surrounding the traffic in antiquities in Italy both currently and in the past. Lobay discusses the various legal and international agreements that have been created to address the problem, and provides readers with a number of resources that discuss the implications of looting on the future of the field.

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PART I

History

CHAPTER 1

Beginnings

Protovillanovan and Villanovan Etruria

Simon Stoddart

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the terminological, typological and chronological basis of the second millennium and the early first millennium BCE, otherwise known as the Bronze Age and first Iron Age of Etruria. For scholars of the European Iron Age, the Etruscans were also part of the Iron Age, but Italian Classical scholars tend to separate the later phases of the millennium into a different field of study for historiographical reasons. All study of what was later to be designated Etruscan, however, needs to start in the second millennium BCE to demonstrate the nature of the social and political transformations that led to Etruscan identity. This chapter covers the material forms of that identity, whereas the human geography of these developments is treated elsewhere (see [Chapter 5](#)).

2. Origins and Dating

All debates on origins are dependent on the creation of well-structured frameworks of dating. Lengths of periods and cross relationships with other parts of the Mediterranean are at the heart of understanding the nature of the radical changes in political organization in central Italy. A crucial problem for all dating is the reconciliation of dendrochronological and radiocarbon dates (where available) with the traditional sequences of material culture. This latter framework has been traditionally tied into more easterly parts of the Mediterranean by cross-dating to create an apparently secure historical sequence. Early attempts at forming a new dating framework were more radical than the more recent relatively nuanced changes in the traditional framework. The dating below follows the more recent, less radically altered, chronologies, appropriate for broad trends, and does not attempt the fine chronologies posited by some scholars which will, in any case, be subject to further research.

The traditional approach to the question of origins was established by Pallottino (1978). He covered the historiography of this issue in great detail in

many of his works. He critiqued the Eastern and northern provenance of the Etruscan ethnos, and replaced these ideas with the idea of a formation *in situ*, drawing on the political change of populations present from at least the Middle Bronze Age (see also [Chapter 13](#)). Although the terminology has changed, modern scholars have built on this reworking of our understanding of the second and first millennia BCE. The contribution of the study of settlement organization in its various forms (see [Chapter 5](#)) has been crucial in providing complementary evidence to the data on material culture and burial which form the main thrust of this chapter. Different scholars, in no small measure influenced by their period and field of study, give different prominence to different periods as thresholds or tipping points in the process. However, in spite of this difference of important detail, most scholars are agreed today that political changes were already under way at least by the beginning of first millennium BCE, and that these became entangled with, rather than were caused by, developments in the rest of the Mediterranean.

3. The Transition from Prehistory

The Early Bronze Age is difficult to define in central Italy, but can be broadly dated to 2200–1700/1600 BCE (Bietti Sestieri 2010). The succeeding first phase of the Middle Bronze Age is a little clearer and often given the designation Grotta Nuova, dated broadly in the period 1600–1400 BCE. This phase is defined by pottery forms and styles that have been subdivided into regional groups. The forms include plates, carinated bowls, jars, and biconical vases. Once the Bell Beaker tradition went out of fashion, there was little decoration beyond cordons, although upright elbow and protruding handles began to be distinctive, in a manner detected in later Bronze Age forms. On this basis, regional groups have been identified within central Italy in the lower Arno valley (e.g., Sesto Fiorentino, Candalla, Asciano), focused on the Grossetano, in the Val di Chiana (e.g., Grotta dell’Orso, Cetona, Grotta Bella) and bridging north (e.g., Lago di Mezzano, Crostoletto di Lamone, Contigliano, Palidoro) and south (e.g., Torre Spaccata) of the Tiber in an area that includes much of the modern administrative region of Lazio. We can also infer from the forms of these vessels that the socially embedded practice of drinking and eating together was already important in these societies.

Recent work by Dolfini (2014) has dated a local tradition of copper and arsenical-copper working in central Italy as early as the Early Copper Age (c.3600–3300 cal. BCE). Dolfini suggests that arsenical and arsenical/antimonial alloys were still exclusively manufactured during the first phase of the Early Bronze Age, although he admits that some tin bronzes may have appeared at broadly the same date (c.2200 BCE). In the Early Bronze Age, metalwork continued to be relatively rare, or at least highly curated,

redeployed and thus not left in the archaeological record. Most analysis has been restricted to the study of axes, with most material coming from hoards of well-preserved (rather than broken or obsolete) objects, and generally found outside settlements, or other stratigraphic contexts. The main concentration of hoards appears, at least in part, to be related to mineral-rich areas (e.g., Cervara Alfina in the Viterbo area, Campiglia d'Orcia, Castelnuovo Berardenga, and Sovicelle in the Siena area, Capalbio, Montemerano, Montagna di Santa Fiora, Saturnia and Scansano in the Grosseto area, and S. Michele di Campiglia Marittima and Torrenuova S. Vincenzo in the Livorno area).

The range of metal types is restricted and related to prestige forms. The axes are flat, with raised margins; their sides also appear to become less straight and more concave over the course of time with a more rounded splaying cutting edge and higher raised margins. The interpretation has been traditionally drawn from the stylistic analysis of hoards (Carancini and Peroni 1999) but, in fact, also relates to more efficient hafting and cutting, as mold techniques became more effective. Other metal forms do exist, including sickles, points, halberds, daggers, and pins. New forms such as swords and more sophisticated axes begin to appear towards the end of the phase. Metalwork was retained because of its intrinsic value and entered the archaeological record in greater quantity in deliberate deposits, such as hoards. Evidence for exchange, other than metalwork, was limited to some amber beads, probably from the Baltic, and glass beads, probably from the Aegean. The location of some settlements along the coast or on islands such as Giglio suggests an increased maritime connectivity by this stage.

Evidence of ritual and settlement (see [Chapter 5](#)) was also rare, apart from hoards. The most prominent funerary ritual is the collective tomb that had been so prominent in the preceding millennium. The best example is the tomb of Prato di Frabulino near Farnese, which preserved at least two individuals who were accompanied by glass beads, a faience necklace spacer, and silver hair spirals, as well as a ceramic bowl with an upright elbow handle (Casi et al. 1995). More substantial skeletal remains, supporting the collective rite, have been found at Naviglione, also near Farnese. These were accompanied by a wider range of pottery forms and arms, and it has been suggested that they are indicative of some social differentiation within society, where burial was only offered to more highly ranked groups, and where rich females were distinguished by personal jewelry and males by arms (Casi et al. 1995: 95). Other rituals included deliberately structured deposits in caves, namely of agricultural produce in Grotta Misa, and of human remains, including children, at Grotta dello Sventatoio south of the Tiber (Tusa 1980).

The full middle Bronze Age (Macchiarola 1987; Bietti Sestieri 2010), often designated Apennine (c.1400–1300 BCE), is much more easily defined in material terms and settlement organization ([Chapter 5](#)). The term Apennine

was first coined by Puglisi (1959) and has endured as a well-defined ceramic style zone across much of the peninsula, associated particularly by Puglisi with a new form of pastoral and transhumant economy. More recent authors (e.g., Barker 1981; Bietti Sestieri 2010) have continued to stress the link between interconnected economy and interconnected styles, primarily in ceramics, but subsequently in the Recent Bronze Age in metalwork as well. Connectivity between the Aegean world and central Italy was much less marked since the evidence has primarily been found in southern Italy. If connectivity were to be considered essential for sociopolitical change, all expectations might have been for a major sociopolitical development in southern Italy on the back of this interaction, but it was in central Italy that the later more prominent developments occurred.

The Apennine ceramic forms comprise bowls and cups of gentle and carinated profile, as well as oval and biconical containers of larger dimensions. The cups are sometimes accompanied by concave handles with raised edges and a cut-out interior. It is, however, the incised or cut-out decoration that is their most prominent feature, arranged in bands of zig-zags and points. Some chronological and spatial distinctions have been interpreted from this evidence, reaching perhaps a peak of conspicuous display in the later phases. The Apennine ceramic style has been divided into three groups for central Italy (and a further nine for the rest of the peninsula). The northerly group is concentrated on the Monte Cetona (Belverde/Grotta Lattaia/Grotta dell'Orso) and a cave slightly to the south (Tane del Diavolo). The dominant decorative motifs here are undulating lines, rectilinear meanders, and lines of inset squares resting on their apices, as well as zig-zag motif set within oblong squares for the later phase. The middle Tyrrhenian group to the south is much more numerous and includes 28 sites north of the Tiber such as Tuscania, Luni sul Mignone, S. Giovenale, Narce, Tofa, Sasso di Furbara, and Palidoro. Distinctive motifs include simple festoons, ribbons with fine dense dots, repeated lunate impressions, lines of herringbone, and, in the later phase, chessboard patterns. In the zone in between, a transitional group has been identified in the Fiora Valley, including sites such as Scarceta, Mezzano, Grotta Misa, Grotta Nuova, and Crostoletto di Lamone. The motifs here overlap with neighboring regions. The whole pattern has been interpreted as representing high levels of connectivity, although this might be better stated as displaying no distinctive regional identities that show absolute boundaries. The pottery can also be employed to infer a new elaboration of eating and drinking of small-scale communities together, given the focus on distinctively decorated drinking and eating vessels as well as storage containers.

Metal production still remained relatively restricted in the Middle Bronze Age, with the formation of local traditions of production. Most of the types, including weapons, had qualities of prestige, and others a utility for deforestation and some wood carpentry. There is, though, an increase in the

range of types since new forms, such as swords, lances, razors, and hair combs appear for the first time. Palstave axes became more sophisticated in their hafting arrangements, with the introduction of heightened borders. Spearheads were already of shaft form, requiring a more sophisticated use of molds. Swords tended to be hafted by means of a few rivets, and it was only later that tangs become more common, increasing their strength in combat.

In the succeeding Subapennine or Recent Bronze Age phase (c.1300–1150) (Cocchi Genick 2004; Bietti Sestieri 2010), the whole focus of stylistic attention switched from the body of the vessels to the handles. These distinctive handles took the form of cylinders and snail *antennae* in the early period, and handlebar, lobe, and duck shapes in the later one. The main forms continued to be bowls and carinated cups, generally with a large opening, as well as forms with a more sinuous profile, mugs, jars, and storage vessels of varying size. All the pottery was hand-made in central Italy, although the southern regions of the peninsula were already coming into contact with Mycenaean ceramic traditions.

Metal production not only began to increase in the Recent Bronze Age, but also became consolidated as one major regional tradition throughout Italy, with a tin content of between 9 and 11 percent, and more sophisticated forms of multiple-piece molds (Carancini 2004). The quantity of objects increased, and began to be found in settlements, including tools (knives, chisels, sickles, and axes) as well as weapons. The axes developed from externally hafted palstaves to more efficient, more sophisticated, internally hafted palstaves. Swords developed in response to their use as slashing weapons in various degrees of robustness, and there is some evidence that spears were employed more frequently in their own right. It is also notable that knives and sickles were important innovations. Dress pins continued to be important in a range of stylistic forms, but violin bow fibulae were added to the repertoire of costume. In general, there was an increase in the variation of forms of personal adornment with pendants, tweezers, bracelets, rings, and hair rings increasing in their range. Razors continued from the previous period. Evidence for all stages of bronze working, probably dated in part to this period, has been discovered at Scarceta, and molds have been found at Pitigliano and Grotta a Male. In central Italy, it is only at Scarceta that sociopolitical developments based on production appear to be more prominently visible, albeit on the basis of one metallurgical workshop which continued into the final Bronze Age. Hoards were less frequent from the period, but have been found on the coast at Piano di Tallone in the Grosseto area. The composition of hoards started to center on objects at the end of their use life, rather than the pristine objects that predominated in the earlier phases. This change in the composition of hoards suggests a difference in their symbolic meaning, perhaps related to closure of the cycle of life (cf. Brück 1999), rather than a strictly metallurgical function.

Evidence for burial continued to be relatively rare in the central regions of Italy, particularly in comparison with the south. Some caves on Monte Cetona had limited evidence. The Antro del Poggetto had personal ornaments of amber as well as bronzes and pottery. The Antro della Noce had a deposition of three swords. Further south, some tumulus tombs at Crostolletto di Lamone, Tufarelle and Pian Sultano can be dated to the Middle/Recent Bronze Age. Cremation, so important in the Final Bronze Age, does not seem to have appeared until the later Bronze Age.

The Final Bronze Age marked the major transition in material culture and society in central Italy, and provided the foundation for the even more marked sociopolitical changes that took place in the Iron Age (Peroni 1980; di Gennaro and Guidi 2000; Bietti Sestieri 2010). In these respects, central Italy contrasted with the other regions of Italy which, for reasons of connectivity with the rest of the Mediterranean, had been more prominent in earlier periods. Central Italy was also a region which maintained an upward trajectory (Mathers and Stoddart 1994), while to the north the so-called Terramare populations seem to have suffered a crisis and a reorientation towards the eastern Po valley centered on the site of Frattesina at the head of the Adriatic, while to the south, the connectivity with the Mycenaean world underwent a substantial pause. A broad stylistic unity was maintained in the Final Bronze Age, even if subdifferentiated by many scholars, whereas regional differentiation began to be visible in the Iron Age.

One differentiated stylistic area in the Final Bronze Age was centered on the Marche, Umbria, and (mainly eastern) Tuscany. The pottery repertoire comprised closed biconical or oval forms, with a clear neck and out-turned lip; jars with rounded or oblique shoulders and restricted openings; carinated cups and bowls; and bowls with a turned-in rim. Decoration, particularly in cordon form (especially meanders) and channeling, and with raised horned handles, was more elaborate than in surrounding regions, and had a relatively plastic feel. This is attributed by some authors, such as Bietti Sestieri, to contacts with the regions north of the Apennines. It may also be related to the identity of place linked to the new process of bringing systems of sites together on high parts of the landscape such as on Monte Cetona and above Gubbio (see [Chapter 5](#)).

Funerary evidence remained scarce in this northern region of central Italy, albeit consistently following the rite of cremation. Many of the tombs are few in number and lacking grave goods. Some smaller cemeteries with low, even single figures, of burials existed at Ponte San Pietro and Sticciano Scalo in Tuscany and Panicarola, Monteleone di Spoleto and Gubbio in Umbria. The main exception is marginal to the future Etruscan area at Pianello di Genga, where some 650 cremations were recovered from what must have been a much larger cemetery (Bianco Peroni, Peroni and Vanzetti 2000); this collectivity suggests a higher order network of identity. There is also a

comparable and notable connectivity with the wider continental and peninsular world through solar symbols (Dolfini, Malone and Stoddart 2006). In addition, gender identity seems to have begun to surface more distinctively at this time with differentiation between male and female grave goods.

The knowledge of metal production is still based mainly on hoards as well as single finds and artifacts from settlements. Hoards include one from between Manchano and Samprugnano. From this evidence the dominant metalwork includes picks, socketed axes, and winged palstaves from hoards, and knives with twisted handles and arch fibulae with multiple nodules. It is suggested that some of these metal types were derived from exchange to the north. Some hoards from northern Tuscany (e.g., Limone, Pariana, and S. Martino) show evidence of a more local scale of production (including winged palstaves, serpentine fibulae, chisels, and fish hooks). It has been suggested, however, that some bracelets were exchanged along the west coast of Italy into France.

The Final Bronze Age of southern Etruria comprised a distinct style centered on the Tolfa mountains. This style emphasizes incision, particularly associated with cremation, in comparison with the plastic styles of northern Etruria. A distinctive element was the incised imitation of hut roofs on the covers of cinerary urns. It is conceivable that this well-formed identity was linked to the more developed hierarchical and fortified status of settlement in the same region ([Chapter 5](#)).

Metallurgical production also achieved new levels in this period (Massi and Babbi 1996). Tools for agriculture, cutting, working of wood and fishing, metallurgy, and personal adornment became very common. The range and sophistication of production can be seen in hoards such as that of Coste del Marano (Tolfa), an assemblage of 142 objects, which comprised sophisticated prestige objects such as cups made out of bronze sheet (two with elaborated bull handles), large, violin-decorated, sheet bow fibulae, and another fibula with a decorated bow, hair pins, small rings, needles, wheel pin heads, and pendants as well as a range of tools, both small (tweezers, decorated chisels, tanged spatula) and large (winged axe). Another substantial hoard from Limone near Livorno, deliberately deposited in a stone structure, contained decorated bracelets, elaborate chisels, a sickle, a spear head, a razor/knife, fibulae, a horse bit, axe fragments, and tweezers (Cateni 1977). The latest Final Bronze Age hoards from Santa Marinella (swords and axes) and Monte Rovello (socketed and winged axes) show a new intensity of production, and range of intra-peninsula and Sardinian contacts. The technical prowess of these objects had reached a new level, and an entanglement with a transalpine, central, and even eastern Mediterranean “koine” with shared stylistic affinities is apparent. The metallurgical production was probably local, although reaching a level of sophistication of reuse of metals and alloying where metal ore sourcing would now be difficult, unlike in the earlier phases of the Bronze Age. Bietti Sestieri (2010) also emphasizes the role of Frattesina in the eastern

Po valley and Maccarese at the mouth of the Tiber, employing the term “central place” and considering such places new centers for the production of ceramics, metalwork, cloth, horn, ivory, glass, and amber as well as the foci of the new types of material culture. The primary evidence of metallurgy shows the interrelationship of this technology with less researched economic fields of cereal, animal, and even tree agriculture, fueled by new demographic levels. Metals, as well as animals, had very probably become forms of accumulated portable wealth. Tree agriculture (although not securely present until the Iron Age in central Italy) may have tied individuals more tightly to particular parts of landscape. In these cases, the defense of both portable wealth and property invested in the landscape may be the circumstances in which defended sites and, ultimately in the Iron Age, military ideology became more important. However, the emphasis on what has been described by some as a proto-urban landscape is, perhaps, overworked by scholars specializing in the period.

There is much debate over the status of hoards as elsewhere in the Bronze Age of Europe (Rowlands 1980; Bradley 1990; Hänsel and Hänsel 1997). Some authors have considered them to be a mere by-product of metalworking, a frozen moment in time of the production process. For this interpretation, the quantity of apparent scrap metal may be supportive. Others have emphasized other forms of intentionality, whether the accumulation of wealth, the deliberate choice of liminal parts of the landscape for the placing of hoards, or some deliberate ritualization often embedded in daily activities such as the cyclical closure of houses and the creation of middens. Support for ritualization is given by the breakage, and more emphatically, by the deliberate manipulation of fragments of metal in locations such as the hoard of Rimessone, the caves of Belverde, or the middens of Monte Ingino or Monte Ansciano above Gubbio. The presence of middens on the mountaintops of Umbria may also show that our concept of hoards is wrongly conceived. Deposits of wealth may not have focused exclusively on collections of metalwork, but should perhaps be more broadly conceived in terms of the other dense collections of pottery, food and metalwork (Malone and Stoddart 1994a, b). All of these would have demonstrated the mobilization of resources in more or less conspicuous locations.

4. The Villanovan Period

The first Iron Age (Bietti Sestieri 2010), or Villanovan period, marked a considerable intensification of this process; it centered on two areas, the unifocal point of Bologna in the middle Po valley to the north of the Apennines and the multifocal points of Veii, Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Orvieto and Vulci in southern Etruria, north of the Tiber. These were important nodes in

networks of trade, both riverine and maritime, rather than directly centered on areas with the potential for metal ore extraction. For the first time, local populations gathered into major nucleations of population requiring substantially different modes of political organization (see also [Chapter 5](#)).

The changes in production of material culture are more difficult to characterize because of the relative lack of investigation of settlements. Pottery appears to have remained at a household level of production. Ceramic forms were dominated by the biconical shape, but also included small and large amphorae, globular jugs, bowls with turned in rims and horizontal handles between two protuberances, troncoconic bowls with a horizontal lip, small jugs or small mugs with a rounded body and restricted mouth, deep cups and low broad cups with an uplifted vertical two opening handle. The most frequent decorative design was geometric, executed with a comb, as well as grooves, incisions and various forms of dimple. In the later phases of Quattro Fontanili, one of the best known cemeteries from Veii, comb decoration decreased, while imports from the Euboean Cycladic area increased, accompanied by imitative forms (Toms 1986).

Metallurgical production continued to intensify during the Villanovan period, although most of the evidence comes solely from the cemeteries (such as the Ripaie cemetery of Volterra), as well as some hoards (notably Goluzzo and Santa Marinella). The early phases were characterized by skillfully crafted, prestigious metalwork. Fibulae, for example, had highly worked and decorated arches. Spearheads were also elaborately decorated, along with winged palstaves; other forms included socketed axes of modern format, knives, horse bits, swords, and many other types of tools. One of the most important hoards from Piediluco-Contigliano at the transition from the Final Bronze Age to the Iron Age, contained bronzes and tripod fragments from Cyprus (Bonomi Ponzi 1970). This same hoard also included fragments of sword types (Torre Galli and Contigliano), socketed spearheads, horse bits and numerous fibula styles. Some of the latter seem to have had specific gender associations, the swollen arch with women and the serpentine with disc with men. The sword also appears to have taken on a particular role of identity, with both the blade and the sheath displaying a considerable decorative focus in examples found in the centers of Vetulonia, Populonia, and Vulci. In the later phases of the Villanovan, an even greater level of specialization was achieved in both ceramic and metal production. Sheet metalworking for containers and defensive weapons such as helmets ([Figure 1.1](#)) and shields became highly developed, suggesting the presence of specialized bronzeworkers. At Veii there was a production of wheel-turned, painted ceramic cups in a development that was entangled with the Greek world in terms of technology and stylistic interpretation. Vulci, Bisenzio, and Tarquinia had other ceramic forms entangled with the local and Greek worlds that had a more geometric decoration.



Figure 1.1 Villanovan crested helmet, c.800–750 BCE. Bronze. London, The British Museum, Inv. GR 1968.6-27.1.

Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

It is in the funerary sphere, however, that the best evidence of the period has been researched. For the first time, cemeteries were made up of hundreds (if not thousands) of tombs, in a manner that began to have a more clearly structured relationship to the communities from which they derived. Situating tombs in well-defined areas around the powerful focal place of the newly expanded Villanovan communities added a further weight of identity to the power of community. From this pattern, we can interpret the *longue durée* tension seated within future Etruscan society between the corporate

community and the descent groups that comprised the parts of that community. This heterarchical relationship was never conclusively resolved in Etruscan society, and ran in tandem with a dynamic equilibrium between roughly equally ranked primate communities, where, unlike south of the Tiber, no single community achieved dominance. This tension between community and descent group was also played out in ritual practice, where the component elements expressed their shared and differentiated identities by buying in, or not, according to their expressed allegiances within the very fluid politics of this formative and changing political landscape. The communities of Vulci and Bisenzio, for example, specialized in miniaturized grave goods. Populonia and Vetulonia, on the other hand, specialized in chamber tombs and those set within circles of stones.

In addition to an expanding understanding of the social context of these developments, we have an increasing appreciation of the thick description of the ritual involved. The temporal dimension at the beginning of the Iron Age involves an exclusive cremation rite (except in Cerveteri and Populonia where some inhumation was present from the beginning) and, in the second phase of the first Iron Age, an increasing presence of inhumation, expanding, at least in south Etruria, into a substantially inhuming ritual by the Orientalizing period that followed. The tradition of cremation continued into the Roman period in northeast Etruria in communities such as Chiusi and Perugia.

In some cases, the funerary ritual can be reconstructed with some precision. Iaia (1999) has shown that in the case of rich graves at Vulci, the funerary rite of passage can be teased out of the material record in the ground where burnt and intact material culture can be readily distinguished in careful excavation. The deceased was first placed on a funerary pyre accompanied by objects that related to him or her as an individual, such as fibulae, and by objects of great symbolic redolence. A good example is the Cavalupo tomb where a lozenge-shaped belt of sheet bronze, seven fibulae with swollen arches and disc feet, one of the leech fibulae, two wheel pin heads and two formless bronze objects were heavily contorted by fire. It is often forgotten that the funerary pyre would have entailed the mobilization of perhaps a ton of wood to achieve effective combustion of a 75 kilogram corpse, entailing an expenditure considerably out of proportion to the ash residue of as little as 1.75 kilograms. During open-air cremation, the sinews of the body can tighten, providing evocative effects of movement in the body as well as an active metaphor for the transition from life to death. Once the cremation had taken place, the remains were gathered and placed in an ossuary together with the most personal items that had accompanied the deceased to the funerary pyre. This ossuary was generally a biconical urn with incised geometric decoration with a single horizontal or vertical handle. The ossuary was often covered by a clay helmet that was itself surmounted by miniaturized representation of the roof of a hut, indicated by the crossing beams at the apex of the roof. As a third

stage, this ossuary was itself dressed with a necklace and cloth, separating the bodily remains of the deceased from the living and perhaps symbolically adumbrated by the solar and bird motifs on the belt of Cavalupo. As a fourth stage, the basal earth of the pyre was placed in a stone custody chamber on which the ceramic ossuary was eventually placed. As a fifth stage, more generalized, less personal objects were placed around the ossuary (e.g., ones that had not been on the funerary pyre) along with offerings. Finally, at the end of ritual, vases were deliberately broken and libations made over the grave.

The earlier phases of Iron Age ritual comprised very small numbers of grave goods, generally only a fibula, a razor, and a spindle whorl, and a few distinctive graves with different grave goods. Scholars have struggled to detect emerging rank or status in these tombs, even suggesting that conspicuous consumption was forbidden by the funerary ideology of the time, masking the emergent inequalities that may have been present in these demographically burgeoning communities. One of the most developed analyses was undertaken by Iaia (1999) for Tarquinia for the first phase of the Iron Age, although, as he admits, the analysis is a prisoner of the presence of distinctive male or female material culture since the bones are not independently sexed. One set of male burials has ashes placed in cinerary urns with a bowl cover, usually in a simple cutting in the ground. Most of these (87%) have a simple razor and, sometimes, a serpentine fibula (13%). Another set of male burials had ashes placed in a cinerary urn with a helmet cover. In this case, the grave goods are sometimes absent (36%) or highly varied, including fibulae (23%), a razor (6%), a miniature cart (9%) or full-size arms or horse bits (21%). The female burials are generally equally simple. The vast majority (73%) have a spindle whorl, up to four fibulae and some ornaments. A small number have fibulae and a hair spiral or more elaborate spindle whorls or dress decoration. Some exceptions have been pointed out by scholars that may show multiple strategies for legitimizing power. Only five known, principally male, burials from Tarquinia were placed in a hut urn, and these were accompanied by combinations of razor, fibulae, bracelet and lance head. There were similar house urn burials at Veii. Likewise, some female burials at Tarquinia showed elements of distinction. One at Arcetelle included an incense burner cart, another at Rose had Nuragic bronzes, and some others much more elaborate dress items: gold fibulae at Impiccato and Arcatelle or 41 fibulae, glass beads, and a more elaborate burial structure at Arcatelle (Hencken 1968). There was also a category entirely without grave goods, except a bowl lid: these may have contained infants.

A small number of other tombs particularly from Tarquinia have been identified as having a very close linkage to the preceding Final Bronze Age ritual, such as Tombs 25 and 51 at Poggio dell'Impiccato, Tomb 3 of Monterozzi, and Tomb 179 of Selciatello di Sopra. A further group breaks the

explicit avoidance of militaristic grave goods by including a single sword, a practice that appears to have been concentrated in the cemetery of Impiccato and Monterozzi. These graves may indicate individuals whose descent groups were testing the limits of control of conspicuous consumption, showing their relative status compared with others, and preparing the ground for a much more substantial breaking of these limits in the later second phase of the first Iron Age (from the eighth century onwards) and above all in the Orientalizing period that followed, as shown most explicitly by the Tomb of the Warrior at Tarquinia dated to the late eighth century BCE (Babbi and Peltz 2013).

The ideology of these rich graves from the second phase of the Iron Age/Villanovan period was focused on the warrior. Graves were arranged by descent group with explicit display of multiple dimensions of wealth. The grave goods typically included a range of sheet bronzes (biconical urn, drinking vessels, ritual cart, a crested Villanovan helmet ([Figure 1.1](#)), a shield and cuirass), sword, spear and other prestigious items. Typical examples include the AA1 grave at Quattro Fontanili in Veii, Tomb 871 at Grotta Gramiccia in Veii and the Tomb of the Warrior at Tarquinia (Babbi and Pelz 2013).

The presence of weapons in graves can thus be interpreted in a substantially ideological framework, perhaps as a counter-identity to that of the female. However, the broad trends, taken together with the presence of defended sites (see [Chapter 5](#)), can be taken as an indication of the presence and/or nature of warfare (Osgood, Monks, and Toms 2000; Harding 2007). As has been pointed out more generally for the Bronze Age and early Iron Age of Europe, raiding may have become an important feature of the lives of the second millennium BCE, as the valuable resource of metal, as well as tethered resources such as living places, perennial tree crops, and even perhaps terraced landscapes required defense. There is also the fact that the heightened production of metal was strongly interconnected not only with more efficient agricultural production, but also with the more elaborate use of secondary products ranging from cheese to textiles. In the varied socioeconomic circumstances even of a relatively small region such as central Italy the implementation of a pattern of high-prestige male war bands both to raid and defend these resources may not have been all pervasive, but was likely to be emerging. Unfortunately, we do not have much direct evidence of trauma on human remains, mainly because of the prevalence of the practice of cremation.

Daggers (less than 30 centimeters in length) appear to have been the earliest weapons, and as many as 1700 have been found on the whole peninsula, from their first use until the early Iron Age. These weapons suggest close-quarter encounters, although there is some evidence for the continued use of bow and arrow. The dagger continued in use, although diminished, even when the sword was introduced in the Middle Bronze Age, and the knife (a one-sided

blade) in the Late Bronze Age, suggesting a role of dispatch once swordfighting had been completed. Some of these latest finds were imports from Sardinia. A rarer, long-distance version of the dagger was the halberd, in many respects a dagger on a pole.

The next technology, introduced in the Middle Bronze Age, was the sword. Some 400 examples have been found on the whole peninsula. At first, this took a thrusting, piercing, rapier form, but was replaced over time with the more robust slashing sword. The rapier technique required greater technique or luck to be effective. The splaying leaf-shaped sword could, however, be more adventurously employed in different ways, and reward both a greater range of skill and sheer physique. Its mere weight would probably have had a severe punitive effect on the opponent, in addition to providing defensive blows. The stronger sword blade, the more effective hilt, and the throwing of spears thus changed the effectiveness of warfare.

In the early Iron Age, certain sword types were, in broad terms, shared between Italy and central Europe, including the distinctive antenna sword and the related full-grip type, whereas tanged swords, including those with a mushroom shaped pommel, were distinctively Italian. These were accompanied by large spearheads and axes, as well as parade armor and crested helmets. Stary (1981) and Harding (2007) suggest that a melee type of warfare, preceded by the throwing of javelins in the ninth century, was replaced in the course of the eighth century by greater emphasis on close-quarter fighting with hand-held spears and shorter swords and axes, defended by round shields.

5. Conclusion

The evidence of burgeoning material culture, warfare and settlement combine to suggest a strongly upward trajectory of political development in the course of the second and early first millennia BCE. Unlike many other Mediterranean regions in the Bronze Age, the economic and political cycle moved onwards and upwards in terms of production and demography. This momentum was the driving force that gave birth to the identity which we define as Etruscan.

When and what should be defined as Etruscan is an interesting question. In terms of timing, it is probably anthropologically incorrect to define anything as Etruscan until the seventh century BCE, when the level of political organization was of sufficient scale to sustain a crystallization of such a terminology by the communities themselves. However, even in this later political phase, much of Etruscan identity was vested in the descent group and the community (often a city), and thus the concept of Etruscan primarily represents an externally imposed category, in no small measure influenced by

the written sources and the external communities from which these writers derived. The role of prehistory and protohistory is more to define the economic basis on which the considerable political achievements of the Etruscans were made. The response of central Italy, and parts of northern Italy, to connectivity with the rest of the Mediterranean was dependent on the nucleations of populations and the creation of community (detailed in [Chapter 5](#)). These communities have sometimes been considered by scholars (Renfrew 1986) to be of equal rank and influence on their territories. In fact, more detailed examination shows that the level of political hierarchy in each community was as different as their modes of production and practices of burial suggest.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Bietti Sestieri 2010 is the best general overview of the whole peninsula during the period. Mathers and Stoddart 1994 provides the background of the Bronze Age in the rest of the Mediterranean. Puglisi 1959 remains a seminal account of the economic foundations of the Middle Bronze Age. Peroni 1979 remains the seminal account of the sociopolitical changes during the period. Iaia 1999 gives an excellent flavor of the depth of information available from Iron Age burials.

CHAPTER 2

Materializing the Etruscans

The Expression and Negotiation of Identity during the Orientalizing, Archaic, and Classical Periods

Skylar Neil

1. Introduction

Etruria between the eighth and fifth centuries provides one of the most dynamic and materially interesting contexts in the study of the ancient Mediterranean. The complex socioeconomic hierarchies that developed over the course of the Iron Age are suddenly and vividly illustrated with the adoption and adaption of new forms of material culture, made available to the Etruscans through their participation in a flourishing Mediterranean trade network (see further, [Chapter 6](#)). The concentration of smaller rural populations on large, strategic sites throughout the region beginning in the Late Bronze Age continued to intensify and the resulting emergence of Etruscan urban centers had a dramatic effect on the organization and exploitation of the landscape (see [Chapters 4, 5 and 7](#)). New institutions and monumental forms develop in response to the demands of a more complex political structure. The expression of identity and beliefs likewise evolves over this period, as Etruscan individuals situate themselves within the new social order. The materiality of these expressions varies across Etruria, creating a rich diversity of case studies for what it meant to be “Etruscan.” By the end of the fifth century, the urbanization process had matured, but many Etruscan cities faced additional challenges, especially new external political pressures from the expanding Roman Republic ([Chapter 3](#)).

This chapter outlines and contextualizes the cultural changes apparent in the material record over the course of the eighth through fifth centuries. The narrative will actively avoid the more problematic tradition within Etruscan studies that attributes cultural change to external influences and the “natural” result of interactions between the Etruscans and other Mediterranean peoples. It is imperative for those new to the study of the Etruscans to be aware and skeptical of the pervasive influence of this viewpoint. This chapter is divided chronologically into three periods: the Orientalizing, Archaic, and Classical periods. This terminology is modern and highly problematic, as it largely

correlates to typological distinctions of style, which are, in turn, influenced by the traditional study of Greek art (the term “Orientalizing” is especially problematic: Riva and Vella 2006). Nevertheless, these periods will be used to avoid chronological confusion for readers interested in consulting other sources on the Etruscans.

2. The Orientalizing Period (700–575)

While the Orientalizing period generally corresponds to the time between 700 and 575, this chronological designation is mostly arbitrary, in that it pertains to very broad stylistic changes in material evidence rather than to specific historical events. The current consensus among prehistorians maintains that the trends and patterns involving settlement and landscape patterns seen during the seventh and sixth centuries were the product of socioeconomic developments and settlement reorganization originating in the Late Bronze Age that slowly developed through the Iron Age. The major urban centers of the later period – Veii, Tarquinia, Caere, Vulci, and Volsinii (Orvieto) – had their origins in conglomerations of Villanovan villages during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, and through the process of synoecism (communal dwelling), they became significant population centers. It is during the Orientalizing period, however, that the material representation of the underlying socioeconomic changes of these developments manifested themselves perceptibly in the archaeological record.

These changes are documented within the context of funerary evidence and the spatial organization of settlements. It must be noted that funerary evidence makes up a significant percentage of the material evidence available to scholars over the past two centuries, which accounts for the disproportionate focus on burial practice as a line of enquiry. Nevertheless, the significance of funerary evidence and burial practices to the study of a cultural context must not be downplayed. Funerary and burial rituals are suffused with significance since they not only express the identity of the deceased and his or her position in society, but they also functioned as meaningful practices for the living (see further, Tuck 2012).

Villanovan burial practices in Etruria evolved between the ninth and eighth centuries, with the inclusion of more prestigious items – such as weapons, armor, decorative ornaments, and other metal goods – within particular graves, and an increasingly unequal distribution of these items amongst a few (see [Chapter 1](#)). These practices developed further during the Orientalizing period, not only in the transition of the dominant burial form from cremation to inhumation (although this practice was not adopted uniformly across Etruria: cremation persisted in northern Etruria, sometimes alongside inhumation, most notably at Chiusi), but also in the inclusion of more

numerous and distinctive burial items, especially those of foreign manufacture. Elite tombs from this period – notable examples include the Tomba di Bocchoris at Tarquinia, the Tomba dei Flabelli Bronzi at Populonia, the Circolo di Bes at Vetulonia, and the Barberini and Bernardini tombs at Praeneste – contained luxury imports from various parts of the Mediterranean: Greek ceramics, especially banqueting equipment; ivory and ostrich eggshell objects; bronze bowls, cauldrons and stands from Cyprus, Phoenicia and Syria; elaborate gold jewelry; and other distinctive goods (see [Chapter 6](#)). Orientalizing decorative motifs were also commonly seen on both imports and locally produced items. These included stylized floral and natural motifs, especially palmettes and lotuses; mythological creatures (e.g., griffins and sphinxes) as well as animal forms (e.g., bulls and lions).

The gentilicial naming system likewise emerged during this period, emphasizing the importance of ancestry, not only in terms of the veneration and remembrance of one's forebearers, but also in the continuation of gentilicial lines and the negotiation of kin relationships within an evolving socio-economic hierarchy (see [Chapter 14](#)). The Tomb of the Five Chairs at Caere, for example, includes a secondary room off the main burial chamber that contains five rock-carved thrones on which were positioned seated terracotta figures, both male and female, interpreted as representations of ancestors (Camporeale 2009). Nearby were rock-carved altars and receptacles for offerings and liquid libations, an early testament to ancestor worship. Moreover, gentilicial relationships provided a new standard for negotiating and maintaining access to new sources of material wealth. The continued deposition of family members within chamber tombs over generations – as well as luxury funerary goods – associated displays of wealth and power with a specific kinship line.

Control over access to resources and wealth, as well to imported goods, led to a new way of materializing relationships of power and authority that is, fortunately, perceptible in the archaeological record through artifacts such as the fan, axe, and lituus (trumpet). However, most scholars believe that these relationships existed in Etruria as early as the Late Bronze Age and then continued into the Iron Age and beyond (Pacciarelli 2000; see also [Chapter 1](#)). In her comprehensive study of the emergence of Orientalizing “symbols of power” within the funerary context, Corinna Riva (2010), for example, concluded that it is not these particular symbols that convey power and authority, and it is only their understood value within their eastern point of origin that influences previous scholarly interpretations of their place within Etruscan society. Rather, Riva argues that power and relationships of authority are expressed with domestic imagery of the house or hut, which predates the visual changes seen in the Orientalizing period, as seen in the existence of cremation hut urns. An example of the replication of the household interiors within monumental tombs can be seen in the Campana

Tomb 1 in the Monte Abetone necropolis at Caere. There, an elaborately constructed wooden ceiling, benches, and other furniture and household equipment are all carved from the bedrock. The depiction of the domestic space, in conjunction with displays of military equipment (e.g. weapons, chariots, and spears), reiterates the kin group's ability to defend itself from other families, and most importantly, to maintain power and authority over them.

The burial space also became more elaborate in the seventh century, creating a clear delineation of space between that of the living and the dead (see [Chapter 11](#)). In some cases, the burial structure was conspicuously elaborated above ground, such as in the construction of monumental tumuli at sites such as Caere (the Banditaccia necropolis) (see [Figure 11.1](#)) and Vetulonia (Naso 2000). These tombs served as visual reminders of the power of a particular group within the local community inscribed into the landscape. Some tumuli were located within the immediate environs of later urban centers (e.g., at Caere), but isolated examples near secondary settlements and in rural areas have also been found, such as those near Marsiliana d' Albegna and Florence (Comeana and Quinto Fiorentino, respectively), suggesting the existence of rural elite groups with power over access to local resources. The founding of two unique settlements during the Orientalizing and Early Archaic periods – Poggio Civitate at Murlo near Siena and Acquarossa near Viterbo – further strengthen the argument for the primacy of the gentilicial group and illustrate the way this was maintained outside the context of the pre-urban centers. Both sites have yielded evidence for domestic activity, workshops and, most importantly, monumental architecture. The size and durability of these buildings and their component materials are significant relative to previous forms of Etruscan architecture. The use of these qualities to commemorate a certain ideology distinguishes a structure as “monumental” in comparison with contemporary buildings (Thomas and Meyers 2012; Meyers 2013). The Archaic monumental complexes at these sites, which were preceded by smaller Orientalizing structures, were elaborately decorated with terracotta sculpture, including revetment plaques depicting scenes of processions and banqueting (see [Figure 23.3](#)). It is likely that these images served various functions, including both ritual practices and performances that reinforced local political authority (Edlund-Berry 2012; Warden 2012). During the Orientalizing and Archaic periods, the Etruscan belief system and the praxis thereof were inextricably meshed with other practices in daily life that centered on the role of elite individuals within society at large (for Poggio Civitate: Nielsen and Tuck 2001; Tuck 2006; Tuck et al. 2009; and his [Chapter 8](#) here; for Acquarossa: Strandberg Olofsson 1989; Wikander and Wikander 1990; Winter 2013).

A number of new techniques and stylistic changes are also visible within the material record of seventh-century Etruria. However, these developments

should not be quantified on a simple scale from “primitive” to “civilized,” or equated with identity per se. Rather they should be applied as a useful metric for chronological identification, and for the sake of a general familiarity with particular trends, especially for the reader new to Etruscan studies. In addition to the refinement of the traditional impasto ware, a new type of pottery, bucchero, was developed by Caeretan artisans during the Orientalizing period and subsequently spread to other Etruscan centers (e.g., Tarquinia, Veii, Vulci, and Vetulonia). These vessels were deprived of oxygen during the firing process, allowing for the production of a fabric fired throughout to either gray or black and whose surface could be burnished to a glossy finish. Bucchero was largely used in the production of tableware, and one of its earliest forms, *bucchero sottile*, stands out for its thin walls and fine craftsmanship (Figure 2.1). The common consensus previously held that metal vessels from Cyprus and Phoenicia primarily influenced these forms; however, recent studies suggest they result instead from the mutual stimulus for innovation amongst artisans specializing in different fabrics (Rasmussen 2006; Perkins 2007; De Puma 2013b; and Chapter 15). Orientalizing motifs enhance a great deal of the bucchero that has been recovered in Etruscan funerary and religious contexts. Early examples, such as the unique sherd with a birthing scene discovered in 2011 at Poggio Colla (Perkins 2012), contain incised and/or stamped designs, while later types display molded reliefs.



Figure 2.1 Kantharos with impressed fan designs, c.650–600 BCE. *Bucchero sottile*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1921 (21.88.146).

Another ceramic style, known today as Etrusco-Corinthian, developed around the middle of the seventh century, in production centers located at Vulci, Caere, and Tarquinia. Its painters employed a black-figure technique to decorate the surfaces of their vases with motifs drawn both from the natural world and the standard Orientalizing repertoire (see further, Ambrosini 2013).

Perhaps the most significant development of the Orientalizing period, especially within the contexts of self-expression and constructing identity, was the adaptation of the Euboean alphabet (transmitted most likely through their apoikia (colony), Pithekoussai, which was founded around 760) and the beginnings of literacy (Agostiniani 2013; see further, [Chapter 14](#)). The earliest Etruscan inscriptions begin to appear around 700, with the majority originating in southern Etruria (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002). A miniature ivory tablet excavated from the Circolo degli Avori tomb (c.670) near Marsiliana d'Albegna and now in Florence is not only incised with all the letters, but also appears to have had an area once covered in wax where an individual could practice with a stylus (the latter was also recovered) ([Figure 2.2](#)). A category of object that is especially illustrative of this point are the ivory plaques inscribed with the names of particular individuals, which have been recovered from sites such as Poggio Civitate, Sant'Omobono (Rome), and Carthage (Wallace 2008). Scholars believe these objects recorded special relationships between two plaque-holders in distant communities. Dedicatory inscriptions likewise qualified the relationship not only between the dedicant and a specific divinity, but also between the dedicant and the object itself. Etruscan votive dedications follow a uniform convention from the perspective of the object: "I am [the object] of [dedicant]..." As Wallace and others have demonstrated, the use of a written language represents a powerful tool that not only allowed individuals to identify themselves and their specific place within their own ancestry and social history, but it also provided a means whereby the relationship between an object and its owner, or a gift-giver and a recipient, could be defined.



Figure 2.2 Writing tablet incised with the letters of the Etruscan alphabet, c.675–650 BCE. Ivory. From the *Circolo degli Avari* in the Banditella necropolis at Marsiliana d’Albegna. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 93480.

Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

The hallmark of the Etruscan Orientalizing period is the emergence of new, distinctive material forms that were used to express different aspects of an elite Etruscan’s social, economic, and political identity. In particular, the development of written forms of language allowed these new ideas to be conveyed more effectively, creating, most importantly, archaeologically identifiable indicia for the presence of Etruscans not only in Italy but also throughout the Mediterranean (see further, [Chapter 6](#)). Although there is a definite continuity of population in central Italy over the course of the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, it was only during the seventh and early sixth centuries that the groups developed a self-conscious and multi-faceted identity as “Etruscans.”

3. The Archaic Period (575–480)

The settlement centers of the previous period continued to draw population from the rural hinterland, creating a system of hierarchy not seen elsewhere in the Mediterranean in which the largest centers – especially the southern Etruscan sites (see [Chapter 9](#)) – were significantly larger than the next largest group of sites by an order of magnitude. As a result, there were significant

developments within the sociopolitical sphere that brought about a new reference point around which Etruscan individuals could formulate a new identity: the urban center (see further, Leighton 2013).

The construction of walls represents the most significant development in the establishment of urban identity and space as a “city,” since their function was to delineate clearly the bounds of what was urban territory and what was not. Of those that have been recovered archaeologically, the earliest examples – constructed during the mid-seventh century with mudbrick – come from Roselle and Vetulonia (see further, [Chapter 10](#)). During the sixth century, the inhabitants of Caere, Populonia, Volterra, and the Piazza d’Armi plateau at Veii also built fortifications. Not only did the existence of a city wall manifest, physically, the understood boundary between urban and rural space, but the scale of the mobilization of manpower and resources necessary to undertake their construction also demonstrated the extent and power of each center (see [Chapter 7](#)). By the beginning of the fifth century, local identities were strengthened with the production of city-based coinage, modeled largely on Greek units of measurements. Populonia and Vulci each produced some of the earliest coins, further reinforcing the cohesion of these political units in expressing a discrete and individual identity.

The intensification of agricultural production in the hinterland, an important part of supplying and supporting the urban centers, likewise led to significant, permanent changes in the landscape around the urban center. *Cuniculi* (underground water channels) were used to both drain marshland and irrigate drier areas, thus vastly increasing their suitability for agricultural production. To facilitate movement of resources and communication, road networks were also improved over the course of the seventh and sixth centuries: the early tracks that followed natural ridgeways or valleys were replaced with roads made suitable for wheeled traffic – through cuts in the rock – and which followed easier gradients in the landscape. Many were also created through the use of cuttings, bridges and culverts, demonstrating the Etruscans’ superb engineering skills at this time (Potter 1979; and [Chapter 10](#) here).

The emergence of the monumental sanctuary in the late sixth century may arguably be the most significant cultural development following the urbanization process. As in contemporary Greece, these religious spaces not only functioned as symbols of communal or civic identities, but also as a means by which the community’s members could participate actively in maintaining those identities through ritual practice (see further, Rafanelli 2013). Although there is evidence of ritual activity being carried out within structures as well as the more commonly sacred spaces of the previous period (e.g., the tops of hills and mountains, caves, lakes, and springs), the earlier structures lacked the permanence and regularity of the monumental complexes constructed during the Archaic period. These also created a physical delineation between sacred and profane space in the form of a

precinct wall, with gates controlling both entering and exiting ([Chapter 12](#)).

Likewise, one of the forms used to build temples – what Vitruvius (4.7) called the Tuscan type – utilized steps on the facade in order to achieve the same goal. This type contrasted significantly with the Greek peripteral temple that included steps that allowed access to the interior from any side (Colonna 1985; for further elaboration on the symbolic significance of the Etruscan temple form, see Izzet 2001 and Warden 2012). Within some later urban centers, evidence for the practice of communal worship has been recovered from areas with a religious or political significance during the Archaic period. For example, on Tarquinia's Pian di Civita (see [Figure 7.5](#)), archaeologists have found votive deposits, animal sacrifices and other offerings dating back to the tenth century in the vicinity of a natural cavity which also include the burials of a boy identified as an epileptic and several neonatal infants. Amongst the offerings recovered were a ritualistically destroyed axe, a shield, and lituus, which were buried in front of the entrance of a later seventh century structure (Building Beta) which was enclosed within a precinct wall soon after its construction and then roofed in the sixth century (Bonghi Jovino 2010; Bagnasco Gianni 2013; [Chapters 7](#) and [18](#) here). Similarly, beneath the so-called *oikos* building on Piazza d'Armi at Veii, a politically significant structure of ambiguous purpose was decorated with architectural terracottas, and the remains of Iron Age huts and a male inhumation have also been identified (Moretti Sgubini 2001).

Just as monumental sanctuary complexes were divided internally into sacred and profane spaces, they could also act as delineators of the limits of the urban space when they were situated near city gates or on the periphery of an urban center. The temple of Portonaccio at Veii, for example, lies just outside of the city walls along a high-traffic route into the urban center. The temple follows a typical Etruscan plan with a triple-cella layout, and there is also an adjacent piscina (pool) almost the same length as the temple. To the east an altar complex with drainage channels was located; it had an access point of two steps leading up to it from the temple in the west. Epigraphic evidence attests to the dedication of the sanctuary complex to Menerva and Aplu; the aspect of the goddess worshipped there may have been as city protector, which required sacrifice before entering the urban space. The healing and purification aspects of Aplu would also have been appropriate in a sanctuary situated outside of the city walls. Given the presence of water and its location along a key road, many scholars believe the sanctuary was intended for travelers coming into the city to be able to cleanse themselves and dedicate votive objects in a sacred context outside of the city's boundaries (Edlund 1987; Colonna 2002; and [Chapter 18](#) in this volume on votives).

Sanctuaries were also used to delineate the outermost extent of a city's control during the sixth century. In his extensive study on the territories of Caere and Tarquinia, Andrea Zifferero (2002) found that a line of cult sites that ran from

Punta della Vipera on the coast to Grotta Porcina inland fortified the natural boundary of the Tolfa mountains between the two centers. Although these sites were active during the Archaic period, they may have been established earlier to facilitate territorial control. In addition, following the ideas in F. de Polignac's (1995) landmark study on the Greek temples of Sicily, Zifferero further identified the role of the frontier sanctuary as a "zona franca" along the periphery of a territory that facilitated interactions that included economic exchange. The most notable examples of this phenomenon in Etruria are the sanctuaries at the Etruscan emporia of Pyrgi (Caere) and Gravisca (Tarquinia). Exchange and interaction, including heterogeneous ritual activity, are attested at both sites, which were frequented by both local and foreign merchants. In addition, although both had previous structures dedicated to ritual practice, Pyrgi and Gravisca underwent a significant reorganization of their *areae sacrae* during the late sixth century. At Gravisca, the earliest evidence dates to the seventh century, but the first permanent structures used for ritual activity were constructed in the sixth century. The worship of Turan (Aphrodite) and Uni (Hera) is attested through epigraphic evidence. The provenance of the various votives associated with this period – a large amount of Greek pottery (Ionic cups, Corinthian, Laconian and Attic) along with Etruscan bucchero and perfume containers; Egyptian faience figurines of Bes and Horus; ivory reliefs; lamps; Sardinian bronze boats; bronze figurines, and other metal objects (Torelli 1990) – further attest to a multicultural worshipping population. At Pyrgi, although architectural terracottas dating to the sixth century have been recovered, the associated structure from this period has not. The extant remains indicate that the sanctuary was reorganized in 510 so that its two parts were divided by a *fosso* (ditch). At this time, a monumental sanctuary, which consisted of several smaller buildings and altars, was enclosed within a precinct wall, and its main temple, Temple B, was built in the traditional Greek peripteral style. Along the interior of the southeastern side of the sanctuary precinct, about 20 small rooms were constructed, in front of which were small rectangular structures, interpreted as altars (for Gravisca: Torelli 1990; Fiorini 2005; Bagnasco Gianni 2013; for Pyrgi: Pyrgi 1970; Colonna 2003; Baglione 2009, 2013).

Further emphasizing the distinction of the urban center from its hinterland is what scholars term the "ritual halo," a pattern achieved in large part by the construction of necropoleis in the immediate vicinity of the city (for elaboration, see Riva and Stoddart 1996). During the Archaic period, there was a perceptible shift from the highly conspicuous monumental tumuli of the preceding centuries, which reigned over the landscape from strategic vantages, to smaller, more regularly organized tombs. The latter were also frequently aligned along an orthogonal plan, a form likewise used in the reorganization and ex-novo foundations of settlement centers such as Zone N at Acquarossa, Doganella, Piazza d'Armi, and Marzabotto. The Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis (Orvieto) and the Banditaccia cemetery (Caere) are the most

notable examples of this phenomenon, along with the necropoleis of Peschiera and Pian di Mola (near Tuscania). At Populonia, a new tomb form – the *aedicula*, shaped like a small rectilinear building with a peaked roof and sometimes enhanced with antefixes and acroteria – emerges in the mid-sixth century. The burials within these tombs were largely those of aristocratic families, as the *aedicula* type is significantly outnumbered by the more common and much simpler *cassone* (chest) tombs (nevertheless, the latter could sometimes be affixed with acroteria). In the Casone necropolis near Populonia, the *cassone* burials were also arranged in an orthogonal pattern along two roads. Further south, at the Monterozzi necropolis near Tarquinia, rock-cut chamber tombs persist, with a limited percentage enhanced by wall frescoes detailing scenes of Etruscan life, mythological subjects, and landscapes (see further, [Chapter 17](#)).

With respect to trends in grave goods during the Archaic period, there is a noted increase in the deposition of mirrors within female burials by late in the sixth century, a phenomenon which suggests an increasing importance placed on the adornment of the body and personal identity. Decorated examples depict a wide range of mythological and allegorical scenes that allude to the lifecycle and the values and ideals of the Etruscan elite. In a period characterized by the negotiation of an individual between various levels of identities (e.g., personal, familial, civic, ethnic) as well as new social complexities, mirrors provide important insights about Etruscan beliefs and customs (van der Meer 1995; Izzet 1998; Izzet 2007: 43–86; De Puma 2013a; see further, [Chapter 27](#)).

The emergence of influential urban centers in Etruria during the Archaic period resulted in the radical reorganization of the landscape in order to maximize agricultural production that supported a growing populace, communication between the center and hinterland (as well as between centers), and control of the rural areas, especially through the use of strategic sanctuary sites in the buffer zones between territories. Secondary sites that flourished during the Orientalizing and early Archaic periods (e.g., Poggio Civitate and Acquarossa) were destroyed or abandoned by the mid-sixth century, most likely as the result of instability and pressure from the expansion of the larger urban centers (Stoddart 1990, 2010). These urban centers not only delineated themselves through the construction of fortification walls (some earlier than others), but each promoted their individual identity through the character of its production output, their participation in certain burial practices over others, and even in the production of currency.

4. The Classical Period (480–323)

The fifth century is traditionally considered to be a “crisis” period in Etruria, and although this is visible in the material record with respect to some sites, others – especially those inland and in northern Etruria – flourished. The defeat of the Etruscans off the coast of Cumae by the Syracusan navy in 474, an event recorded by Diodorus Siculus (11.51) and manifested visually in the Etruscan bronze helmets dedicated in the Sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia by the victors, resulted in the restriction of their access to Tyrrhenian sea channels (these were now controlled by Syracuse; see further, [Chapter 6](#)). Other historical factors that affected the economic livelihood of the Etruscans at this time include the occupation of Campania by the Samnites (Livy *History of Rome* 4.37.1), the expulsion of the last Etruscan king at Rome (Livy *History of Rome* 11.21.5), and the subsequent conflicts between Rome and Chiusi (Diodorus Siculus 7.3ff.; Tacitus *Histories* 3.72; Pliny *Natural History* 34.139; Livy *History of Rome* 2.14.8–9). However, a definitive link between these events and an economic “decline” in the southern Etruscan cities has not been sufficiently proved.

The restriction of access to shipping channels in the Tyrrhenian sea, however, had a substantial effect on these communities, as is attested by the steep decline in the importation of Attic vessels after the first quarter of the fifth century. Likewise, Gravisca was radically altered: the entrance to the sanctuary complex was moved from the south (facing the salt marshes and the sea) to the north (towards the settlement and Tarquinia) and several other buildings were constructed for storage purposes. This reorganization program was likewise accompanied by a significant decrease in Greek imports and the cessation of metallurgical activity previous associated with the sanctuary complex. Moreover, there is a perceptible shift within the votive inscriptions recovered from the names of Greek deities to Etruscan ones (Comella 1978). At Pyrgi, perhaps in deliberate contrast with the Greek-style Temple B, Temple A was constructed adjacent to the earlier one on a much larger scale and in the Tuscan style around 500. Recovered nearby, and likely dating to the same period, were the notable Pyrgi tablets, three gold leaf sheets inscribed in both Etruscan and Phoenician describing an alliance between the Caeretan Etruscans and the Carthaginians and the worship of Uni-Astarte in the name of the ruler (*zilath*) of Caere (see further, [Chapter 14](#)). This evidence supports the existence of the military alliances reported to have been made between the Etruscans and the Carthaginians in various naval incursions leading up to the Battle of Cumae. An enormous amount of votive material has also been associated with Temple A; it includes pottery (local and imports from Greece), loom weights, spindle whorls, spools, votive terracottas, coins (including fifth-century Greek and fourth-century Punic ones, as well as later Greek and Roman types), and miscellaneous bronze, iron, lead, and bone objects. Votive inscriptions are mostly dedicated to Uni (see further, Baglione

2013).

Also attested during this period at both Vulci and Tarquinia is a decline in Greek imports and other luxury goods in funerary environments. However, the inland and northern Etruscan cities continued to flourish. For example, although there is some evidence for settlements during the Late Bronze Age and Villanovan periods, as well as for Archaic necropoleis, the urban center of Perugia developed much later than many other Etruscan cities, with its walls constructed only during late fourth–early third centuries (della Fina 2002). Before this time, Perugia was unable to control its territory, resulting in a weakly controlled and highly permeable boundary. As a result, there was a proliferation of hilltop sanctuaries in the area from which thousands of schematic bronze figurines have been recovered. The hinterland of Perugia underwent a reorganization in the fourth–third centuries similar to that evident for other Etruscan centers 100 years before. Within the Perugian hinterland, however, territorial control was maintained through the usage of satellite settlements (e.g., Civitella d’Arna and Bettona) and fortified hilltops (Col di Marzo) (see further, Stoddart et al. 2012). Likewise along the northwestern boundary of the Vulcian territory during the fourth–third centuries, a line of similarly-fortified hilltops secured strategic passes between the Fiora and Albegna valleys (Rendeli 1993; Perkins 1999).

Boundaries were further solidified through the use of *tular* stones (Lambrechts 1970). The *cippus perusinus*, which dates to the third or second century, represents one of the most significant examples of these boundary markers. It describes an agreement over the sharing of land between the Velthina family based in Perugia and the Afuna family from Chiusi, on whose land a tomb of the Velthina family was located. The inscription covers the front and one of the side faces for a total of 46 lines, making it the second longest Etruscan inscription ever found (see [Chapter 14](#)) ([Figure 2.3](#)). Although the use of *tular* stones is attested from the sixth century, only their later use within northern Etruria has been documented archaeologically. In addition to examples inscribed *tular spural* (city boundary), one inscribed with *tular rasnal* was recovered at the base of the city of Cortona (TLE 632). Perhaps the latter was used to differentiate the Etruscans’ territory from that of the Umbrians to the east. Its survival, moreover, helps us better understand issues related the self-conceptualization of the Etruscans as a discrete ethnic group in central Italy.

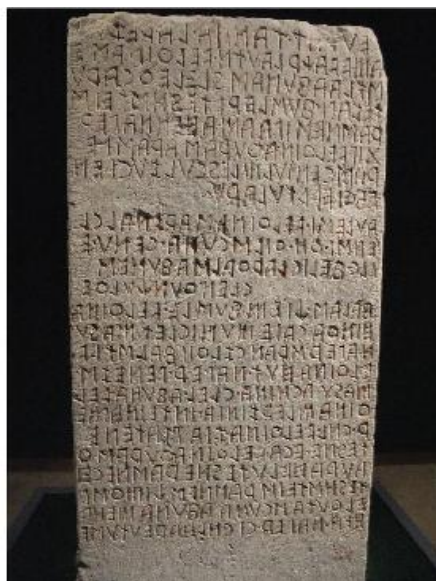
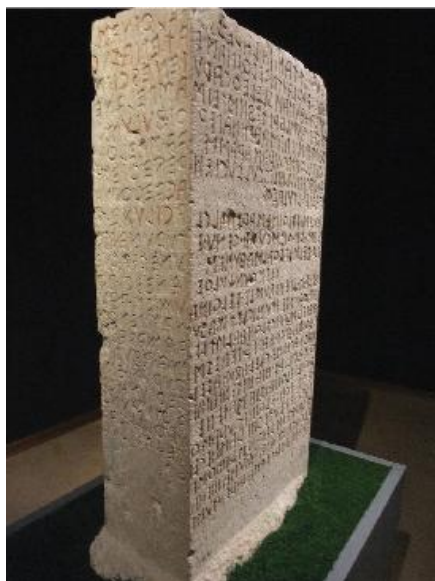


Figure 2.3 Inscribed cippus (the so-called *cippus perusinus*), second century BCE. Travertine. From Perugia. Perugia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell’Umbria, inv. 366.

Photo: S. Neil.

The recent discovery at Campo della Fiera of the probable location of the *Fanum Voltumnae* (Stopponi 2011, 2013), where representatives of the various Etruscan cities were purported to congregate annually in the worship of Voltumna (Livy *History of Rome* 4.23, 25, 61; 5.17; 6.2), strengthens the argument for the self-conceptualization by the Etruscans living in the different urban centers of ethnic or perhaps cultural affinity (e.g., common interests and priorities). Indeed, there may have been physical indicia of a shared ethnicity/identity that are either undetectable in the material record or whose significance has been lost on modern observers. Like individuals today, an ancient Etruscan would have had constantly to construct, negotiate and emphasize accordingly the various facets of his or her identity – be it personal, gender, familial, socioeconomic, civic, ethnic, etc. Given the problems of the literary record, the archaeological record – from small finds, such as jewelry (Chapter 19) and textiles (Chapter 16), to monumental architecture, such as temples (Chapter 12) – remains our most reliable evidence for reconstructing those “identities.”

5. Conclusion

From the eighth to fifth centuries, the region known as Etruria underwent dynamic changes that resulted in the emergence of a highly stratified

landscape focused on the emergent urban centers. Accompanying this transformation were new forms of material culture, which were used to illustrate the evolving social and political relationships during this period. The negotiation of these various facets of identity – and the material expression thereof – by the Etruscans over the course of these four centuries has created for archaeologists one of the most interesting material record case studies.

Nevertheless, to generalize excessively about the “Etruscan,” especially as a direct comparison to the Roman or Greek, is to render two-dimensional a deeply complex stratum of social history. Over the past 20 years, much progress has been made to establish the study of the Etruscans within a credible theoretical framework independent of the anachronistic biases of the written record and the typological hyper focus of the culture-historian. The pursuit of a comprehensive and contextually based approach to the Etruscans will continue to generate the most high-quality research, and allow us to gain new insights into their history and culture during four centuries of significant transformation.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Given the broad scope of this contribution, suggested readings will be limited to general treatments of Etruscan material culture and identity, suitable for introductory readers. The past five years have seen a significant boom in the publication of edited volumes on various topics related to the Etruscans: religion (Gleba and Becker 2009; de Grummond and Edlund-Berry 2011), architecture (Thomas and Meyers 2012) and material culture (Perkins and Swaddling 2009). Most recently, Turfa 2013 brings together the latest research on a range of facets of Etruscan culture, from the general development of Etruria to specific studies on art, manufacturing, religion, town planning, chariots, food, textiles, etc.

Two noteworthy monographs have also been published recently on the Etruscans. Izzet 2007 looks at changes in the surface decoration of various categories of material culture as it relates to the development of Etruscan social institutions during the Archaic period. Riva 2010 examines the transformation of burial practice in relation to the evolving social and political structures, especially the expression of power, during the seventh century.

On the topic of identity and ethnicity in protohistoric Italy, including that of the Etruscans, studies are somewhat less frequent. Cornell and Lomas 1997 remains relevant in its treatment of the study of ethnicity within an Italian context. Bradley 2000 provides a solid synthesis of archaeological data to present a nuanced conception of Umbrian identity. An excellent application of a similar approach to various groups of ancient Italian peoples can be found in the 2007 edited volume, *Ancient Italy: Regions without Boundaries* (see especially the introduction by Isayev and the entry on the Etruscans by Izzet). Perkins and Swaddling 2009 nominally examines Etruscan identities, to varying degrees of success; however, Perkins's contribution on DNA and ethnicity is well-conceptualized.

CHAPTER 3

The Romanization of Etruria

Letizia Ceccarelli

1. Introduction

The Romanization of Etruria can be explored in a number of different ways, but perhaps the most visible is through its material record, which reveals the cultural changes that transformed the Etruscan identity into a Roman one. Cato (*Servius Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros* 9.567), for example, recalls how almost the entirety of Italy was under the control of the Etruscans, and is supported by Livy (*History of Rome* 1.2: 5.33) who reports of their power from the Alps to Sicily. While the ancient sources must be understood within their context (see further, [Chapters 20](#) and [21](#)), they do reveal that the Etruscans controlled several areas. Their economic and political structure allowed for a profound influence on their neighboring populations. It was undoubtedly a multidirectional and reciprocal permeability, integration, and cultural domination – even in Rome. Yet, how did the Etruscans come to lose their political power to Rome? In this chapter, I discuss the military events as well as the political, social and economic processes that led to the incorporation of the Etruscans into the Roman state.

2. Roman Expansion

Historically, the beginning of the territorial expansion of Rome can be associated with the conquest of Veii in 396,¹ a military and political event that Roman sources later depicted as mythical, as with the victory over Troy after a 10-year siege. The crucial reason for the rise of Rome had been its control over the river mouth of the Tiber and the salt mines, but then Rome annexed the territory of Veii, estimated as being around 562 square kilometers.

During this period (in 390), the Gauls sacked Rome (Livy 5.50.3), and Caere gave shelter to the priests and the sacred symbols of Rome (the sacred fire) as well as the Vestal Virgins. In exchange, Rome granted the people of this major Etruscan city *hospitium publicum*, or the possibility of living in Rome with neither military nor tax duties. Given these diplomatic ties, Rome then annexed Caere as a *civitas sine suffragio*, granting its people Roman citizenship, with the exception of the power to vote in Rome for magistrates,

with the *municipium* a status later given to many of Etruria's conquered cities.

Following the Gallic sack, Rome created the colonies of both Sutri and Nepi, defined by Livy (6.9.4) as the gates of Etruria (*claustra Etruriae*). In turn, the inland Etruscan cities, with the exception of Arezzo (Livy 9.32.1), attempted to create a league against Rome. It was formed at a meeting of the Twelve Etruscan cities at *Fanum Voltumnae*, today identified with the site of Campo della Fiera, near Orvieto (Stopponi 2011 and 2013; see further, [Chapter 9](#)). The list was never recorded by the ancient sources, which only cite the later addition of Populonia (Servius *Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros* 10.172). In 358, the city of Tarquinia, allied with the Faliscans and with Caere, declared war against Rome. This ended in 351 with a 40-year truce, during which time Rome was engaged in defeating the southern populations, including the Latins, Volscans, and Samnites.

In 311, an Etruscan army occupied Sutri, but Rome reestablished its power a year later. This led to Rome's expansion into the upper Tiber Valley and Umbria, including the creation of the Latin colony of Narnia-Nequinum in 299, while it formed treaties with Cortona, Arezzo, and Perugia and renewed the truce with Tarquinia for 40 years. It was not until the early third century that a coalition of Gauls, Samnites, Etruscans, and Umbrians challenged the power of Rome but they were subsequently defeated in 295 at Sentinum. This event marks the end of the Etruscans' political power: Rome embarked on a recurrent strategy of conquering each of Etruria's cities and ravaging their territory. In 294, for example, the Romans devastated the territory of Volsinii and conquered Roselle. A treaty for 40 years was granted to Volsinii, Arezzo and Perugia in exchange for a payment of a large sum of money. In 283, following a Gallic invasion in the territory of Arezzo and the defeat of the Roman army, the Roman colony of *Sena Gallica* was established. Later, P. Tiberius Coruncanius conquered Vulci and Volsinii (in 280).

The final event of the Roman conquest of Etruria was the defiance of Caere in 274–273 when, according to Dio Cassius (*Historiae Romanae* fr. 33), the confiscation of half of the city's territory led to the founding of the maritime colonies of Alsium (247), Fregeneae (245), Pyrgi and Castrum Novum (264). After the rebellion of Volsinii in 265, the city was destroyed and the town was relocated next to Lake Bolsena. Similar treatment was applied to the Faliscan city of Falerii Veteres in 241, as recalled by Zonaras (*Epitome Historiarum* 8.18): a new town, called in the modern literature Falerii Novi, was built along the route of the via Flaminia. Another crucial event took place in 265: the Romans pillaged the federal Etruscan sanctuary of *Fanum Voltumnae* in the territory of Volsinii, one of the meeting places of the Etruscan League, which was then dissolved. According to Pliny (*Natural History* 34.16.34), the conquering general, Marcus Fulvius Flaccus, took 2000 bronze statues from the site to Rome as booty, dedicating some of them in the temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta in the Forum Boarium.

In addition, the list of cults introduced in Rome in the third century reveals that the establishment of a new cult reflected the Roman domination of the territory of the deity's origin. Thus, the *evocatio* of Juno Regina from Veii in 396 marked the Roman victory over the city. Gods from other subdued cities were also evoked: Vertumnus-Voltumna from Volsinii (264) and Minerva Capta from Falerii (241). Accordingly, all the Etruscan cities came under the political control of Rome but only in 89, with the end of the Social War, did their inhabitants become Roman citizens with full rights.

3. Roman Infrastructures: Roads and Centuriation

Results from several surveys in Etruria, such as in the territory of Volterra, the Albegna Valley, Tuscania, Cerveteri (ancient Caere), Veii and the Tiber Valley (Barker and Rasmussen 1988; Terrenato 1998; Hemphill 2000; Carandini and Cambi 2002; Patterson 2004; Cascino, di Giuseppe and Patterson 2012) reveal that the period of Romanization was not characterized by a dramatic change in the occupation of landscape as is suggested from historical accounts. In contrast, the archaeological data suggest an intensification of landscape exploitation from the third century, with many rural settlements. This pattern fits into the land-ownership structure and social structure of the Etruscan elites, who maintained their social and economic control despite the political changes. It is also reflected in the presence of rural aristocratic villas (for example, Selvasecca (near Blera) and Giardino Vecchio (near Cosa), see also Becker 2013), as well as the specificity of local responses to external factors that impacted on the landscape, such as the road networks and land division (on the Etruscan landscape see [Chapter 4](#)).

The phenomenon of colonization aimed both to extend the territory of Rome and to place strategic garrisons in key areas. Their network served to guard crucial points of the frontier and the lines of communication, as well as to increase the presence of Roman and Latin citizens. Together with the construction of a road system that connected these colonies, many scholars (e.g., Liverani 2011) interpret this as forming part of Rome's conquest strategy.

The existing Etruscan road network was efficient in connecting the cities and was used extensively by the Romans in the early stages of their conquest. However, when it was no longer sufficient, between the second half of the third and the first half of the second centuries, Rome created a new framework of paved roads that crossed Etruria in order to conduct efficient military operations in the recently conquered areas ([Figure 3.1](#)). Although there is a lack of precise information from both the ancient sources and the archaeological record, it is clear that they made use of the Etruscan road system (Liverani 2011). The via Aurelia, the first Roman road to be built, runs

parallel to the Tyrrhenian coast towards the north, and was constructed in either 241 or 144. It linked the new colonies along the coast but did not include the old centers of Caere, Tarquinia, Vulci, and Populonia, which were approached by side-roads (*diverticula*).



Figure 3.1 Map of Roman colonies and roads in Etruria.

Drawing: Camporeale 1992: 103.

Constructed in 220, the via Flaminia reached the Adriatic coast by crossing both Etruscan and Umbrian territory. The via Clodia connected Tuscania, Vulci, and Cosa and was joined by the Cassia just outside Rome, which was probably built in the first half of the second century. The latter led to Bolsena, Chiusi, Cortona, Arezzo, and Pisa. Along these routes small functional centers were created: these include Forum Cassii, a *praefectura* in the territory of Tarquinia, Forum Aurelii in the territory of Vulci, and Forum Clodii in the territory of Caere. This road network had a dual function: not only did it serve the Roman military but it also allowed the conquerors to exert a new economic control over the territory, shifting the power from the Etruscan cities located at a distance from these roads. As a result, the latter slowly

declined in favor of newly created Roman towns.

The Romans punished the conquered southern Etruscan cities by confiscating part of their territory and imposing a new land division related to new settlements or colonies. Centuriation – the regular division of land in a layout of square grids – was the method used to parcel out the territory. Rome applied this method extensively in Italy, although perhaps less so in Etruria due to its undulating landscape. Nevertheless, surveys in the territory of Vulci have revealed centuriation plots around the colonies of Cosa and Heba (Figure 3.2).

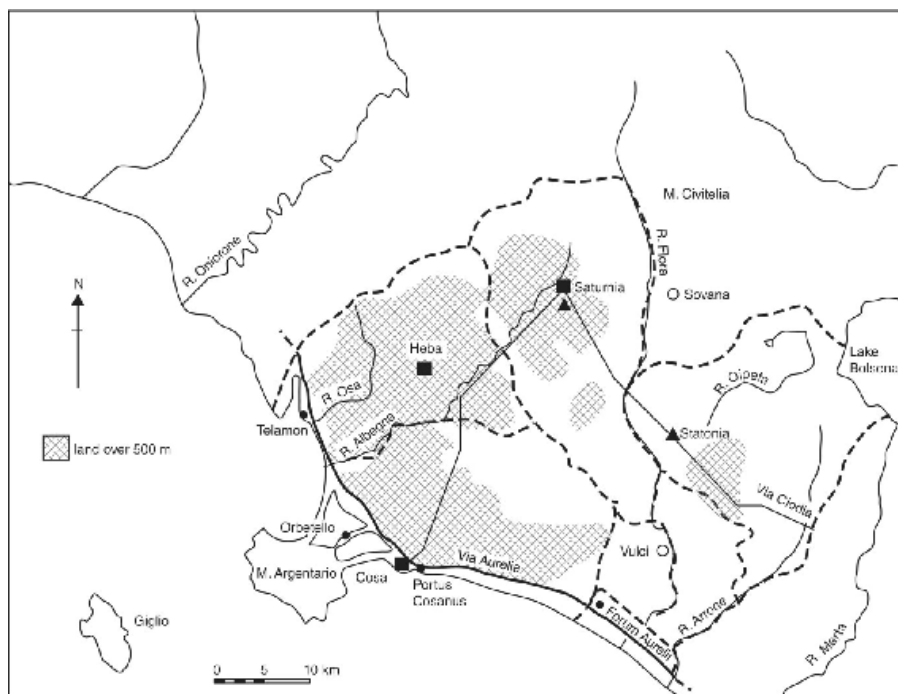


Figure 3.2 Map showing centuriation plots around the Roman colonies of Cosa and Heba, third – second century BCE.

Drawing: Barker and Rasmussen 1998, 2000, fig. 105, p. 270. Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

4. Roman Colonies

The practice of the foundation of colonies in Etruscan territory by Rome was very limited in the third century, due to extensive prior urban development by the Etruscans and a policy of alliances with the ruling elites of their cities (on foundation rituals see Chapter 7). For instance, only one colony, Cosa, was

founded (in 273) in the territory of Vulci – although it was inhabited by at least 2500 settlers and their families (Barker and Rasmussen 1998).

Rome reorganized the Etruscan cities under its control and gave them different administrative statuses such as *civitates foederatae*; also created were both Latin colonies, and, from the first half of the second century on, Roman ones. The previously mentioned maritime colonies in the territory of Caere were small settlements devoted to the control of the coast, with 300 settlers/soldiers and families, as Rome built the naval power that resulted in the first Punic war. In the second century, several other colonies were founded, including Gravisca (181) in the territory of Tarquinia, Saturnia (183) in the territory of Vulci, Heba in the inland of Talamone, and Lucca (180) in the territory of Pisa, a Latin colony set up in order to protect the city from the Ligurians. It is clear that Rome's focus was on the total control of the coast, with smaller settlements and more substantial colonies in the Albegna and Tiber valleys.

The foundation of these colonies was not only intended to serve strategic aims but also to ease social and economic tensions in the Roman state. In a Latin colony, land was distributed among 2500 to 6000 adult males, who in return gave up their Roman citizenship in exchange for larger land allotments. In the territory of Vulci, which was defeated in 280 by the consul T. Coruncianus, the colony of Cosa was built, three years later, to the northwest of the city adjacent to the coast. Traditionally the colony, with its regular layout (e.g., Brown 1980), is interpreted as a smaller version of Rome itself, with a public space – a forum – and a temple dedicated to the Roman state gods, the *Capitolium*. However, such a canonical interpretation of the replication of Rome has been deconstructed with an argument using material culture and cults (Bispham 2006). Architectural terracottas and the reinterpretation of the so-called *auguraculum* on the acropolis of Cosa reveal the existence of a small third-century temple, contemporary to the foundation of the colony, that was rebuilt in the form of the still-standing *Capitolium* only in the early second century (Taylor 2002).

Colonization, therefore, was the political program of Rome's expansion: the conquest of a territory and the assignment of that territory as the property of the Roman people to citizens by means of a process of land division and assignation of plots. Cultural Romanization can therefore be understood as the creation of a network of cities in the Etruscan territories that were subject to Roman law and institutions, and where Latin was the official language.

The Etruscan integration into the Roman cultural and political system was a complex process that had two major parts. On the one hand, the local elites deliberately chose integration as a way of maintaining their privileges and control over the poorer population. On the other hand, the colonies introduced the ideology of Rome, with many of its features, both political and religious.

5. Political Changes

Along with implementing a new military and colonial system, Roman control over Etruria benefited from the static nature of the Etruscans' social structure, which lacked the dynamism of Roman society. In Etruria, a ruling elite held the power, dominating a lower, plebeian class, a system somewhat similar to the Roman clients and slaves but without the latter's practice of manumission. On several occasions the sources refer to revolts in Etruscan cities where the ruling classes sought the help of Rome (Liverani 2011). One such example is Arezzo in 302 (Livy 10.3–5), while in Volsinii (Zonara 8.7.4–8) the plebeian rebellion led to the destruction of the city by Rome.

Generally, for Rome, alliances with the Etruscan ruling elites were very useful as the elites kept the cities loyal and maintained their power within those cities with the help of Rome. The integration of the Etruscan aristocracies into the Roman world took several forms. Firstly, at an economic level, there was the introduction of coinage based on Roman measures, such as at Tarquinia, Volterra and probably at Chiusi (Liverani 2011). Secondly, at an ideological level, there was the adoption of forms of personal celebration in a Roman style. Clear examples are the bronze statues with votive and celebratory function, such as the *Arringatore* (the Orator) dated to the late second century and discovered near Perugia. The man commemorated, Aule Metele (as the incised Etruscan inscription identifies him), is represented in the typical Roman attire for an oration, with the tunic and the toga (the *exigua praetexta*) leaving the right shoulder bare.

Identities, especially in the context of Etruscan cities, were both projected and perceived, and were undoubtedly constantly evolving and shaped by the elites, leading to the existence of multiple identities (cf. Warden 2013). In the sixth century, there was a strong sense of elite identity among the members of the upper class, and the community identified closely with its leading members. By the time of the Social War, the distinctions between ethnic groups had been absorbed by a Roman identity, but Etruscan aristocratic families still maintained their political power by having representatives in the Senate. The public and religious underground complex excavated at Caere, first by Cristofani in the 1980s and more recently by Queen's University (Ontario, Canada) at the Vigna Marini Vitalini (Torelli 2000), offers further evidence of the profound political control of Rome and the inclusion of the Etruscan cities in its sphere. This *templum sub terrae* for the cult of the *Lares Publici* was decorated with paintings, and included an inscription that recalls the dedicator, the Roman praetor G. Genucius Clepsina, who was consul between 276 and 270. This complex, therefore, represents another indication of the elite Etruscan families' ability to exert their power with Roman support.

6. Romanization as Latinization

One crucial element that marked the control of Rome over Etruria was the change of language from Etruscan to Latin (on the Etruscan language see [Chapter 14](#)). As early as the second century, several inscriptions of legislation on bronze tables were written in Latin, for instance at Chiusi (*CIL* I².597), while by the first century many funerary inscriptions were bilingual, and the latest Etruscan inscriptions can be dated to the Augustan and early Julio-Claudian periods. This process varied according to different areas: at Caere, for example, the transition towards Latin had already begun in the third century: half the family names (*gentilicia*) had Latin origins. In Tarquinia, in the same period, this phenomenon was much less common, while the transition to bilingual inscriptions was especially slow in rural areas (Liverani 2011).

The official language in Etruria became Latin with the Social War, when, in 90, the Senate decreed Roman citizenship without any penalties to their loyal allies, among whom were the Etruscans. During the civil war between Marius and Sulla, the Etruscans' support for Marius resulted in Sulla's strong revenge, according to the sources, against Arezzo, Chiusi, Populonia, and Volterra. Roselle, Talamone, and Vetulonia were also devastated, judging by the levels of destruction identified in the excavations. Sulla further punished Etruria by confiscating land for his veterans and by establishing colonies in Fiesole, Arezzo, Volterra, and Chiusi, with many Etruscans forced away from their territory, as recounted by Strabo (5.2.6) writing about the survivors of Volterra. In northern Etruria, Caesar also created minor settlements in Volterra and Arezzo in addition to establishing colonies at Veii, Capena, Lucus Feroniae and Castrum Novum on the coast. Finally, in the division of regions made by Augustus, Etruria became Region VII and its elite was completely integrated into the Roman political system.

The politics of colonization are thought by many scholars to have started in the mid-Republican period, although the canonical interpretation of the replication of Rome has been deconstructed by an interesting argument using material culture and cults (Bispham 2006). Nonetheless, when looking at the *longue durée* of cultural changes, "Romanization" found direct expression in monumental buildings, constructed with a consistent artistic language by local elites imitating and embracing the fashion of their conquerors (Wallace-Hadrill 2008). This was a case of imitation rather than the embrace of another identity, as the dialectic between Roman and non-Roman only ceased to exist after the Social War.

7. The Hellenistic Gods

Sacred architecture and material culture played a crucial role in shaping the social and political identity of the Etruscan cities. The canonical characteristics of a temple, with some variations in plan (Tuscan, as defined by Vitruvius 4.7.1–2) developed after 580: a *pronaos*, the vestibule with columns, the *antae*, prolonging the side walls of the *cella*, and a podium, serving to raise the building from the ground, which was approached by an axial flight of steps. The physical appearance of a temple is an important part of the creation and transmission of meaning, as the erection or rebuilding of a temple and the quality of its architectural decorations had a number of implications, both religious and political – coinciding frequently with important historical events (see further, [Chapter 12](#)).

In the Hellenistic period, from the fourth century on, two artistic styles can be identified in Etruria: Pergamene and Attic. These can be seen in the production of architectural terracottas and cinerary urns, whose mythological subjects frequently contained themes from the Theban cycle.

One of the consequences of the Roman conquest of Etruria was the renovation or new construction of temples between the end of the third and the first half of the second centuries. The style of their sculptures was strongly influenced by the art of Pergamon, which developed in the northern centers with the creation of roof and pediment decorations in the sanctuaries of Populonia, Talamone, Sovana, Vulci, Chianciano, Fiesole, Volterra, and Arezzo (see e.g., Holliday 2009). To the south of the site at Chianciano, for example, in an area known as I Fucoli, a temple has been excavated near a thermal spring. Its roof, dated to the mid-second century, was decorated with several iconographic themes, with a suggested Pergamene influence, including Herakles, Laomedon, and Telephos. The best-preserved terracotta is an acroterion portraying a winged female deity holding a *kantharos*, the typical symbol of Dionysos. In the period of the complete control of Etruria by Rome, themes with an assembly of gods were represented, but other iconographic themes still coexisted. Other artistic themes that continued to be popular include, for instance, the myth of the “Seven against Thebes,” which was the subject of the high-relief pediment at Talamone (see [Figure 24.3](#)) created during the mid-first century (Simon 2013 (see also [Chapter 26](#))).

Dionysian themes and cults were also very popular at the beginning of the second century in Etruria, as illustrated by the terracotta throne discovered in a domus at Poggio Moscini near Bolsena (e.g., see Jolivet 2013). The widespread diffusion of such cults, especially among the middle and lower classes in Etruria, was a potential threat to the aristocratic families in the Senate, who intervened for the first time in 186 on religious matters, outlawing all the Bacchic cults and cult places in Italy.

8. Religion

Etruscan religion, as well as Roman, was a scrupulous performance of a set of rules; it can be defined as a “ritualistic religion,” where rituals and sacrifices were aimed to maintain harmony with gods, and to restore that order when it was disrupted. Therefore, knowledge of the gods and their will were crucial concepts, with understanding and the maintenance of proper relations gained through the correct performance of different operations or rituals. Another important feature of Etruscan and Roman religion was its votive character. It was customary at all social levels to make a vow to a deity in return for the fulfilment of the request (see further, [Chapter 18](#)).

Over 200 Etruscan sanctuaries are characterized by votive offerings, of which 130 votive deposits contain heads, statues, and anatomical models. They are molded, wheel- or hand-made, and dated between the fourth and second centuries. The tradition of anatomical offerings was influenced by the Greek cult of Asclepius at Corinth, where such votives were offered, especially upper and lower limbs. Anatomical votives served as either offerings of thanks or objects of supplication in request for divine attention to the body part represented. The social context in which these cults were developed was generally the countryside, where the health of both humans and animals was fundamental for survival. The origins of rural sanctuaries and their cults focused on the benefit of fields and animals, although healing cults could also be found in cities, as documented in Caere at the Manganello temple.

Religion played an integral part in Rome’s conquest strategy, as it reflected patterns of life and had socioeconomic implications. The sudden increase in the number of votive terracotta deposits in Etruscan and Italic societies has been associated with the Roman expansion in Italy (De Cazanove 2000). Recent studies have related the diffusion of the ritual of the dedication of heads (from the sixth century when under Greek influence) to social changes within Etruscan and southern Italic societies (Gentili 2005; Glinister 2006). According to this interpretation, Rome was part of this area of influence in a relatively late phase from the fourth century onwards. The dramatic decline of votive terracottas at the end of second century could mark the complete shift in Roman religious hegemony, with different forms of worship. Moreover, it is possible to make the assumption that the decline of the phenomenon of the production of votive terracottas was also connected with a demographic decline related to the changing patterns of rural settlements, as a consequence of the Punic wars. Rome required continuous manpower from the colonies and its allies during this long period of war. This had the consequence of removing a part of the population from the countryside, initiating a long-term process that led, during the second century, to economic and social

transformations, as attested by the analysis of sites and material culture patterns in the Tiber Valley. Söderlind (2002) suggested that the decline in the quality and quantity of the votive deposits may be related to the reduced social and economic status of the worshippers. Moreover, the growth in the number of large estates of wealthy landowners possibly encouraged a rejection of these plebeian cults.

9. Funerary Iconography

Confrontations with Rome become a central theme even in the funerary iconography of the Etruscan aristocracy. An example is the painting in the so-called François Tomb at Vulci, the hypogeum of the family of Saties, dated to around 340. The tomb depicts the saga of Servius Tullius who killed Tarquinius Priscus, and a saga of the Vibenna brothers, national Etruscan heroes, represented alongside the myth of Achilles killing the Trojans on the pyre of Patroclus. This dual representation of the Trojan War and the local aristocracy fighting against Rome is clearly referring to contemporary events (see also [Chapter 25](#)).

The tension within Etruscan society at this time is also reflected in the conception of the afterlife, the banquet that, in the Archaic period, symbolized the perpetuation of the “*dies faustus*.” In the Hellenistic period, the banquet is instead related to the departure to Hades. A contrast between life and afterlife and its liminal state – the journey accompanied by funerary demons – is represented on many Hellenistic urns.

At Tarquinia several tombs in the necropolis of Monterozzi offer examples of late Etruscan funerary iconography ([Figure 3.3](#)) (Serra Ridgway 2000). The tombs date to around 300, some with later alterations but generally used for two or three generations of the same family, along with a second-century reoccupation followed by another in the Augustan or Julio-Claudian period. The inscriptions reveal that the first occupants were all freeborn Etruscans while the Imperial-period burials are of slave origins. The architecture and the tomb assemblages, after the early third century, decline, with a period of regrowth in the second century and the total abandonment of the Monterozzi necropolis during the first century. Distinguishing features of the late, painted tombs of Tarquinia are representations of demons guarding the door to Hades: the subjects include Vanth with a burning torch, Charun with snake and keys, and Tuchulcha, the winged demon, carrying the mallet used to bolt and unbolt the gates. This imagery has been traditionally interpreted as showing a sense of pessimism on the part of the Etruscan elite on the impending loss of their political independence (Turfa 2006b). However, even if it does not represent a reflection of a sense of hopelessness, there is an evident change in their funerary ideology (see also, [Chapter 26](#)).

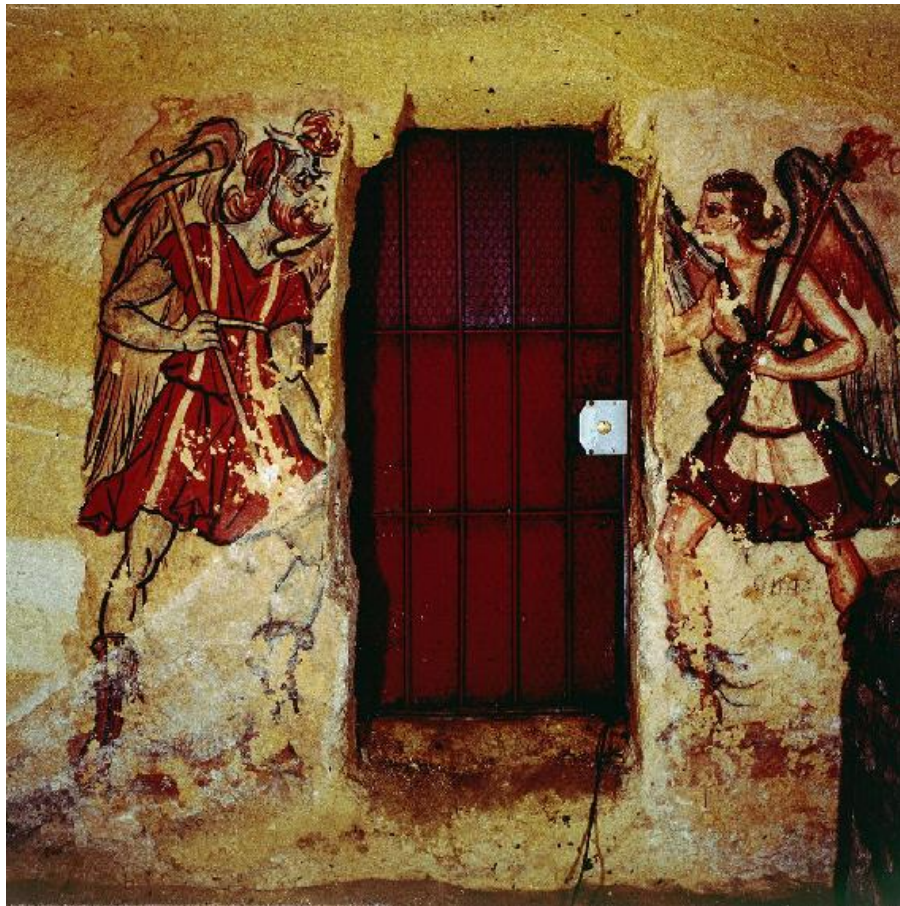


Figure 3.3 Charun and Vanth, from the entrance wall of the Tomb of the Anina Family, third century BCE. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: © 2015. DeAgostini Picture Library/Scala, Florence.

A further cultural change after the Roman conquest of Etruria was the sharpened social gender distinction and hierarchy between men and women, reflected by the male and female figures reclining on sarcophagi or urn lids, such as those found at Volterra. Men are often represented with a patera or rhyton, drinking vessels used in rituals, while women are shown with a fan or a pomegranate, and a drinking vessel only in the case of a priestess. This can be seen as a reflection of the exclusively male participation in religious rituals (Jolivet 2013). Such social changes are further indicated by the cessation of the custom, dating from the Orientalizing period, of indicating the matronymic (the family name of the mother) in funerary inscriptions. Matronymics ceased being recorded during the second century (on family names see further, [Chapter 14](#)).

10. The Revival of the Etruscans

The complete integration of Etruria into the Roman sphere came about when Augustus created Region VII, which, as recorded by Pliny (*Natural History* 3.8–9), was formed of 54 communities and 27 colonies and recreated the Etruscan League that held religious festivals at the *Fanum Voltumnae*. During the Julio-Claudian period, the original League of the Twelve Etruscan cities was extended to include Populonia and Pisa, and its importance is documented by a marble relief discovered at Caere, probably part of an altar dated to 49 CE belonging to the local *Augusteum*. It depicts the founding heroes of the Etruscan cities of Vetulonia, Vulci, and Tarquinia.

However, a substantial role in Augustus's strategy to unify Italy culturally was played by Etruria, especially in the religious and ritual sphere with the *Etrusca disciplina*, a body of religious rules that led at least one Roman (Livy 5.1.7) to characterize the Etruscans as the most religious of all people. Festus (p. 358), in the second century CE, also quotes Verrius Flaccus who, at the time of Augustus, wrote the *Libri rerum etruscarum* which referred to Etruscan ritual books that are now lost.

The Emperor Claudius, in his speech to the Senate in 47 CE (Tacitus *Annals* 11.15), not only described the Etruscan religious discipline as the most ancient in Italy, but he also proposed reforms to the order of the haruspices (Etruscan diviners practicing in Rome), which had been created in the late Republican or early Augustan period. His proposal is also recalled by a marble inscription from the area of the Ara della Regina temple with its list of the *Ordo LX haruspicum*, the order of the 60 haruspices. Such traditions continued until the early fifth century CE, as described in a passage by the historian Zosimos (*Historia Nova* 5.41.1) when Alaric besieged Rome:

Pompeianus, the prefect of the city, accidentally met with some persons who were come to Rome from Tuscany, and related that a town called Neveia had delivered itself from extreme danger, the Barbarians having been repulsed from it by storms of thunder and lightning, which was caused by the devotion of its inhabitants to the gods, in the ancient mode of worship. Having discoursed with these men, he performed all that was in his power according to the books of the chief priests.

In the early Imperial period, there were several members of the Roman Senate and elites with Etruscan ancestry, such as Gaius Maecenas, and Urgulania, a friend of Augustus' wife, Livia, who had privileges similar to members of the Imperial family (Tacitus *Annals* 2.34, 4.21–22). Urgulania's granddaughter, Plautia Urgulanilla, married Claudius in 24 CE. The importance of celebrating one's Etruscan origins is further documented by the so-called Corsini throne, which was discovered in 1732 in the villa of the Plautii Laterani, a wealthy family. Dated to the first century CE, this marble throne not only imitates

Orientalizing bronze thrones but also retains the memory of an important Etruscan symbol of power.

11. Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how the Romanization of Etruria can be explored through a number of themes and how the process is documented in the material record. Several military, political, social and economic events contributed to the incorporation of the Etruscans into the Roman state. Beginning with the conquest of Veii in 396, Rome gained power regionally over the area of Etruria through its control of the river Tiber, the salt mines and the establishment of colonies at key positions, such as at the “gates of Etruria,” Sutri and Nepi. This process continued until 274–273 when Rome conquered Caere, thus bringing southern Etruria under Roman influence.

Correspondingly, the Romans consolidated their influence through the enlargement of the road network, using both the existing Etruscan roads while adding their own in order to connect newly founded colonies and to facilitate the rapid movement of the military. A large number of these colonies were founded along the coastline in order to support and further extend Rome’s control along the coast. Elsewhere, Rome also sought to consolidate its power through political and social methods, best illustrated through its alliances with the ruling Etruscan elite. In the archaeological record, the Romanization of Etruria appears most vividly through sacred and funerary architecture and material culture, such as the famous statue of the Arringatore. A range of methods, therefore, led to the process of “Romanization” in Etruria. Complete integration into the Roman sphere, however, only came about at the time of Augustus, when the Etruscan language was abandoned; nevertheless, certain Etruscan rituals remained throughout the Imperial period.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The majority of general publications concerning the Etruscans cover the period of the Romanization of Etruria, including: Barker and Rasmussen 1998; Camporeale 2000; Haynes 2000; Torelli 2001; Torelli and Moretti Sgubini 2008; Bartoloni 2011; Turfa 2013. On political Romanization: Jolivet 2013; Launaro 2011; Liverani 2011; Munzi 2001; Torelli 2014; Wallace-Hadrill 2008. For the evidence of survey and landscape studies: Barker and

Rasmussen 1988; Carandini and Cambi 2002; Cascino et al. 2012; Cifani 2003, 2013; Hemphill 2000; Sisani 2008; Terrenato 1998, 2001; Patterson 2004; Patterson, Di Giuseppe and Witcher 2004. On funerary ideology: Haumesser 2014; Maggiani 2007; Nielsen 2013; Serra Ridgway 2000; Torelli 2001. On *Fanum Voltumnae*: Stopponi 2011, 2013. On religion: De Cazanove 2000; Gentili 2005; Gleba and Becker 2009; Glinister 2006; Söderlind 2002; Turfa 2006a, 2006b. On Cosa and Roman colonization: Bispham 2006; Brown 1951, 1980; Brown, Richardson and Richardson 1960; Fentress 2000; Taylor 2002.

NOTE

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise noted.

PART II

Geography, Urbanization, and Space

CHAPTER 4

Etruscan Italy

Physical Geography and Environment

Simon Stoddart

1. Introduction

A key feature of Tyrrhenian central Italy, the land later culturally designated as Etruria, is its centrality to the Mediterranean, both in latitude and longitude, on the open face of a projecting peninsula. The peninsula of Italy itself forms the northern edge of an enclosed Tyrrhenian Sea that is a centrally placed microcosm of the broader Mediterranean, one scale of enclosed sea within another. At the smaller scale, this micro sea permitted a scenario of local interaction between the central peninsula and the large islands of Sardinia to the west and Sicily to the south. This local scale may also have been assisted by the high degree of insular corrugation of the coastline in the area between northern Etruria and Sardinia, permitting smaller-scale maritime movement. At a larger scale, this central position permitted a seaborne connectivity with maritime regions further to the east and west, north and south, once the technology was in position to reduce the risk of regular communication (see further, [Chapter 6](#)). Furthermore, communication into the hinterland was facilitated by the presence of substantial navigable rivers – the Arno and the Tiber at the limits of the region – and by relatively substantial rivers in the center, the Ombrone and the Albegna. Between these rivers, the distribution of highly suitable landscapes for agriculture and metallurgy, both the products of neotectonics (i.e., young mountain building), completed the potential for the demographic expansion of highly organized societies. Nevertheless, this centrality came into focus only once a combination of technology, economy, and politics mobilized an intensified use of the terrestrial and maritime landscape. Prior to the Bronze Age, this landscape was relatively underexploited in comparison to the substantial plains of Catania, the Tavoliere, or Thessaly. After the Bronze Age (see further, [Chapter 1](#)), this area became one of the hotspots of the Mediterranean, a characteristic that had considerable longevity if one includes the minor historical switch from the area north of the Tiber to the south of the Tiber. In addition, Etruria was well placed geographically to take advantage of similar hotspots in Greece, the Levant, the Nile and the Middle East, which emerged at the same time.

The fact that Etruria was central to an east–west sea (Broodbank 2013), along

broadly the same latitude, placed the region as a microcosm within a climatic zone, where semi aridity takes the form of predominant winter rainfall, hot summers, and mild to cool winters. The similar latitude enabled the rapid spread of a complex of vegetation and crops, notably those of the Mediterranean polyculture: the vine, olive, and wheat. Furthermore, the neotectonics of the region has also built into this climatic similarity a landscape of verticality. The presence of uplands and mountains (often made of absorbent limestones) within a short vertical distance provided the wood, clays, and fresh water to supplement the resources of the maritime lowlands. These are the principal macrogeographical features that gave Etruria as a whole an earth-based potential once the economic and political conditions emerged. At a more local level, there was considerable regionality in the physical geography of Etruria, a pattern that contributed to the cultural differentiation of Etruscan urban centers. A survey of the principal geographical facets of the landscape illustrates how the local scale of regionality was set within the macro scale of connectivity.

2. The Structural Landscape

The key structural feature of northern central peninsular Italy is the presence of the Apennines which run from close to the sea at La Spezia through a length of some 400 kilometers, varying in breadth between 50 and 100 kilometers, down to the latitude of the Tiber mouth (Sestini 1984), and then beyond down to Sicily (Figure 4.1, Plate Section). The area of lowland below 1000 meters is more extensive in the Etruscan area, since the Apennines curve eastwards before turning south; nevertheless, the peninsula, as a whole, is disproportionately mountainous (less than 20 percent is lowland). Consequently, mountain relief has often contributed to the character and definition of political territories and to the essential regionality of central as well as nearly all of Italy. This mountain chain has also had a profound effect on communications, defining the major routes of access between regions and enclosing the Etruscan and Umbrian political enclave from the east. In total, the presence of these mountains provides a *longue durée* (long-term) setting for human action in the way defined by Braudel (1972) and Broodbank (2013), and developed by some archaeological projects (Barker and Rasmussen 1988; Malone and Stoddart 1994; Malone et al. 2014) in the area under consideration.



Figure 4.1 Satellite image of central Italy in winter (altitudinal differences visible by presence of snow on peaks).

Photo: Jacques Descloitres, MODIS Rapid Response Team, NASA/GSFC.

The Apennine mountain chain forms a continuous and prominent relief from north to south, but is formed of a series of blocks that have different characteristics. This variability has produced a range of diverse weathered products that have further contributed to the regionality of the peninsula. The same area is also very active geologically, leading to an instability that ranges from the dramatic processes of earthquakes and volcanism to the more drawn-out but equally imposing processes of erosion and alluviation, which many authors stress took place episodically and thus had quite dramatic effects on

the living populations (Bintliff 1992). In this fragile environment, humans had to be ready to respond rapidly to perceptible environmental changes (Van der Leeuw 2000). Part of the success of the politics of the first millennium BCE was this effective response.

Neotectonics led to a considerable verticality of the landscape. Transitions from valleys to mountain summits (between 500 and 1500 meters) take place over relatively short horizontal distances and often reach quite substantial heights (1000–2000 meters). The relative youth of the landscape has also led to steeper gradients and more constrained width of valleys (Brown 1997). These constraints have produced a pronounced alternation of aggradation and erosion, leading to a cut and fill stratigraphy that has both a general pattern (perhaps a result of climatic change) and local variations (perhaps a result of human land use) (Brown and Ellis 1995). More geomorphological studies still need to be undertaken to work out the relationship between human action and erosion.

The Northern Apennines

The northern Apennines (Mason 1944a; 1944b; 1945a; 1945b) curve gently from west-northwest towards the east-southeast. Between the Giovi pass (472 meters) near Genova and the upper valleys of the Tiber and the Metauro, the Apennines show an asymmetrical profile. The southern (“internal”) slope is relatively abrupt, marked by broad valleys and basins that run in parallel to the mountain chain itself. The underlying geological structure here has a profound effect on the landscape. On this southern side of the Apennines, there is a series of intermontane basins, well sunk by Pliocene tectonic action, between parallel ridges running with the main Apennine chain from the northwest to the southeast or from north to south. These basins are drained by the Magra, Serchio, Arno (Sieve, Chiana) and Tiber rivers. All were once lake basins, now turned into river valleys, leading to a broadly similar sequence of often heavy clay sediments. Lake Trasimene, the largest lake of the peninsula (128 square kilometers), is formed in a shallow (six meter) depression within the alluvial sediments at one end of the Chiana valley. Much of the relief has been shaped by fluvial action, but given variation by the type of parent rock. The narrow V-shaped valleys of the Ligurian Apennines are cut out of the local marly limestones, sandstones, and shales. The internal area of Tuscany is composed of two zones. The northern area immediately to the south of the Arno has geological formations similar to the Apennines themselves (including limestones and conglomerates). The southern zone around Volterra and beyond has a high presence of marine Pliocene deposits (clays, sands, and gravels). The latter is much affected by dissection and erosion, particularly under the impact of modern agriculture, but this degradation is almost

certainly a longer-standing problem. At the southernmost limit of this area lies Monte Amiata (1738 meters), the most northerly and some of the most distantly active (9 million to 1 million years ago) evidence of volcanism in the peninsula. The southern coastal part of this zone comprises the distinctive Maremma region (see further, below).

The Central Apennines

The relevant, most northerly, part of the northern Umbria–Marche section is made up of deep sea and marly formations, starting in a northwest to southeast direction and ending by running almost north-south towards the south. The peaks of this section vary between 1000–1200 meters and 1500–2400 meters and are often rounded or flat-topped. The geology consists of various types of limestone: compact and homogeneous, cherty, marly, and thin bedded (*scaglia*). On the inner, Umbrian side of the mountains, there are rather longer mountain basins than in Tuscany that are filled with broadly similar sequences of lake and river deposits (e.g., the Tiber valleys, the valleys of Gubbio, Gualdo Tadino, and Norcia).

The Coastal Plains

The approximately 570 kilometer coastline of northern and southern Etruria is today marked by a series of sweeping bays composed of coastal plains of varying size, separated by rocky headlands and other promontories (Mason 1944a: 73). The headlands and promontories are either coastal extensions of the pre-Apennines or former islands now joined to the mainland. Some islands remain isolated by sea, as is the case with Elba, the principal island of importance for the Etruscans. It lies about 10 kilometers offshore within easy sight of the Italian peninsula and consists of a confused geology of schists, diorites, limestones, and other rocks of a wide range of dates. This tectonic confusion has also revealed a great variety of mineral resources.

The lagoonal conditions along the Tyrrhenian coast are typical of the early stages of coastal evolution found in many other areas of the central Mediterranean (Delano Smith 1979: 328–359). Sediment has been deposited vertically and horizontally in a most measurable form since the Roman period, but clearly also before then. These changes are readily recognizable, but highly localized in their effect. The reconstruction of the coastal landscape is complicated by the conclusion of some researchers (Schmiedt and Caputo 1972) who argue that the level of the Mediterranean was one meter lower in the Etruscan period. It is more difficult to judge to what extent the coastal headlands have been eroded, but this erosion can be considered to have been

less drastic. Beach areas were highly unstable until the relatively recent drainage schemes and therefore unsuitable for major centers. As a result, these centers were placed on more stable landforms which, in only a few cases (e.g., Populonia and, in conditions of less stability, Pisa), were immediately on the sea itself. It is also clear that parts of the resulting lagoon landscape were highly favorable to certain types of economic exploitation. The lagoons and their margins would have contained important resources such as fish and, in certain areas, grazing for animals. This type of economic strategy certainly continued into the Latest Bronze and perhaps into later periods, where political constraints led the population to be less directly associated, except cyclically, with these lagoonal areas.

The first stretch of coastal plain from La Spezia to Livorno is very narrow in the northern part, and archaeological survey and geomorphological reconstruction by the Ager Lunensis survey have shown this portion to be of relatively recent, and largely Roman, formation (Delano-Smith, Mills, and Ward-Perkins 1986). Further south, the plain opens into the Serchio and Arno deltas, which required a much more complex reconstruction of landscape changes. Mazzanti and Pasquinucci's study (1983) combined geomorphological and archaeological evidence and led to the suggestion that the coast around the delta would have been at least five kilometers further inland in the Etruscan period. The Archaic site of Massarosa was placed on piles in a presumably still seasonally waterlogged location and now lies three to four kilometers inland. Pisa and associated Archaic sites would, similarly, have been placed on coastal or lacustrine margins (Pasquinucci and Storti 1989; Bruni 1998: 38–53).

Between Livorno and Punta Ala, there are a series of smaller plains separated by narrow coastal strips. The first plain is that of the Val Cecina, which has a southerly coastal extension broken by Monti Calvi and then opens again into the Val Cornia behind the largely Cenozoic marl–sandstone promontory of Piombino on which the center of Populonia was placed (see further, [Chapter 7](#)). Cartography dating back to the fifteenth century shows that considerable portions of this plain were lagoonal until drainage took place in the nineteenth century (Fedeli 1983: 53–62). Neolithic finds from the central portion of this area indicate, nevertheless, that the lagoons were accessible even at this date. A not dissimilar area was utilized during the Orientalizing period. However, in common with the Orbetello area to the south, there was a sand dune bar running along the modern coastline to the west of the lagoon, probably by the Pleistocene, but judging from finds eroding from the modern sand dunes, the current surface dates to the Neolithic or Bronze Age. This would have been the landward access route to the promontory of Populonia, and formed the simple beach required for the port of Populonia, protected in part by the promontory itself. The Follonica plain to the southeast, further around the Gulf of Follonica, is also a former lagoonal area, with local access from at

least the Bronze Age. Some significant recent pollen analyses and other environmental work have been undertaken at the Lago dell' Accesa, which is set back some 15 kilometers from the coast from Follonica. The results show the impact of the sixth-century BCE Etruscan village on the lake (Drescher-Schneider et al. 2007) in terms of wood clearance and *secale* (rye) pollen at a much earlier date than the agricultural impact shown by the study of the steep-sided volcanic lakes further south.

Between Punta Ala and Cape Linaro, there are two rather larger coastal plains, separated by the Albegna valley and Monte Argentario. Punta Ala itself forms a more abrupt coastline, whose steep cliffs and small inlets have probably changed little since the Bronze Age. The region to the south is the Maremma (Ciacci 1981), one of the larger coastal plains of central Italy, which is of interest to Archaic Italy because of the presence of sites such as Roselle (see further, [Chapter 10](#)). The northern part of the region is bounded by the Colline Metallifere, which, as the name suggests, is an important metal ore zone that projects into sea, with Elba at its maritime limits. The whole region is composed of four river basins: the largest, the Ombrone (the fourth largest of the peninsula), is accompanied by three smaller rivers, the Albegna and the Fiora to the south and the Bruna to north. The Albegna (67 kilometers long in a catchment of 737 square kilometers) forms an important physiographic divide between northern and southern Etruria and is the most studied valley of the region (Cambi 2002). The valley was thus an important feature of the Archaic political geography, providing a self-contained buffer zone and a means of communication into the interior. A prominent characteristic feature of the coastal margin of this river valley is the lagoon that runs from Ansedonia to Pescia Romana and the poor drainage promoted by sediment transport from up valley which blocks the exit to the sea. Another prominent feature is the high promontory of Monte Argentario which protects the lagoon from the sea approaches and whose sand bars connecting to the mainland seem to have been a feature since at least the Bronze Age (Bronson and Uggeri 1970). Behind the lagoons there are also some low, isolated hills which stand above the surrounding alluvial plain; together with a hill zone backing onto the high mountains, these complete the key ecological zones of the valley (Caravaggi 2002). Southwards, a coastal bar continues to follow most of the modern coastline sheltering the former lagoons behind. Emporia, such as that of Gravisca (see further, [Chapter 9](#)), were established on the wider stretches of these bars in positions where shipping of shallow draught could have been beached.

Further south, Cape Linaro stands at the center of a promontory that allows only a much smaller coastal strip. Structurally, the cape forms the seaward projection of the Tolfa mountains, an important mineral source, that form an important east–west boundary which was open to adoption as a political boundary by the two Etruscan cities, Tarquinia and Cerveteri, lying to the

north and south. After Cape Linaro, initially rocky with steep cliffs, the landscape opens out again, particularly as it meets the Tiber delta. The delta of the Tiber to the south is much more difficult to reconstruct for the pre-Roman period (Salomon et al. 2009), although it is clear that the coastal plain has advanced many kilometers even in the last millennium.

The Tuscan Upland

The Tuscan upland is an area of variable height and geological formation made up of three principal parts (Mason 1944a: 274): the Maremma/western highlands, the Siena Trough, and the Chianti. The Maremma and western highlands fringe the coast and divide up the coastal plains described above. The mountains are composed principally of Tertiary sandstones penetrated by some hard older rocks. The northern portion is generally of a lower altitude (below 300 meters except for an area centered on Monte Vitalba). The southern portion is higher, reaching over 1000 meters in the most northerly sector. Many of these upland areas, although not too high to have formed major barriers to communication, were probably unsuitable to have been intensively exploited agriculturally in the first millennium BCE. Some of these mountains contain mineral resources which, it is usually assumed, were exploited from at least the Final Bronze Age. The Siena Trough is occupied by much softer Pliocene rocks that, under modern cultivation, have been very susceptible to erosion. This low-lying area allowed relatively easy communication to the east of the comparatively upstanding uplands towards the coast. The suitability of the area for agriculture is variable, depending on the surface deposit (Barbieri 1966; Valenti 1995: 11–14). The compact clays would have been generally unfavorable to early agriculture and particularly subject to erosion. The coarser sands would have been more readily cultivable, but not especially fertile, soils. The Chianti to the east was another more upland area, although rarely exceeding 1000 meters in altitude. The majority of the parent rock is sandstone, with some higher peaks, such as that of Monte Cetona to the south, of limestone. The terrain is not easy to cultivate without considerable investment in terracing, a feature that dominates the landscape today. It is probable that considerable areas remained wooded and unexploited (see further, [Chapter 10](#)). The southern Tuscan upland is dominated by the most northerly extension of volcanic activity. This area, although containing some mineral resources, would have been rugged, inaccessible and, most probably, sacred, during the first millennium BCE, since Monte Amiata, at its center, rises to 1700 meters. The mountain itself is densely wooded, and the extension of this forest cover would have been much more considerable in the pre-Roman period. The Tuscan upland area as a whole lay between the more readily exploited zones of the coast and the inland tectonic valleys. The only centers of importance and long duration (e.g.,

Volterra and Monteriggioni) were at the head of communication channels facilitated by rivers penetrating from the coast. This intermediate geographical space was readily adopted as a temporary buffer area between complex polities.

The Inland Tectonic Valleys

Inland, the terrain is dominated by a series of roughly parallel, drained, lake basins. Lake Trasimene is a remnant of a much larger complex of interlinked lakes dating from the Pliocene. Frequently these valleys have complex drainage patterns which have altered considerably over time, most recently under the influence of humans, and are usually flanked to one side by a prominent tectonically induced escarpment dominating the valley, provoking asymmetrical drainage and colluvial/alluvial deposits. Many of the valleys have remnants of Plio-Pleistocene deposits that were too heavy for early agriculture. The valleys have clearly constrained communication and formed the natural territories for political units. There is, also, an important degree of verticality in many of these valley systems, where, within a short horizontal distance, both lowland agricultural lands and upland pastures and woodlands can be reached. The degree of fertility of these valleys, however, depended greatly on local factors: these include the proportion of heavy (clay), generally Pleistocene, soils as well as the often lighter soils of more recent formation. Political systems within these units would thus have been able to control a wide range of agricultural resources, but resources that would have been severely limited by the increasing altitude of even the valley bottoms as one moves east into the Apennines.

Moving from the north to the south, and then from the west to the east, ten major basins can be identified: the Mugello, the Arno plain, the Valdarno connecting to the north with the Casentino (the upper Arno), the Val di Chiana, the upper Tiber, the Perugia–Todi, Foligno–Spoleto, Gubbio, and Gualdo Tadino basins. Other smaller basins lie further south in Umbria, outside the area covered in detail in this chapter. The basins to the extreme north and east (e.g., Mugello, Casentino, Gubbio, and Gualdo Tadino) are placed within the Apennines themselves, but only the Casentino is a severely enclosed valley with one restricted entrance from the south. Geographically, the Casentino is an isolated upland valley, chosen in the Medieval period as a refuge by monastic orders (Wickham 1988). In contrast, the Mugello was an important communication route through the Apennines towards Marzabotto and Bologna. The Valdarno, which effectively connects the two basins, opens out from a narrow gorge at the confluence of the Sieve (from the Mugello) into a wider valley bordered by gentle Pliocene hills. Although this area contains a fairly dense rural population today, the Pliocene soils would not

have been very suitable for early agriculture, because of their steep gradients. The valley continues southeast, bounded to the north by the high pastures of the Pratomagno that flank the Casentino and to the south by the Chianti uplands, passing a small gorge before almost immediately entering the well-defined basin of Arezzo. This basin is well circumscribed by hills and is an important center of communications, not only from the Valdarno, but also north into the Casentino, east into the upper Tiber, and, most importantly, south into the Val di Chiana.

The Val di Chiana is a relatively flat and wide plain stretching to the south. This valley was a well-defined geographical unit, providing natural boundaries for the political units developing within the area, facilitating easy communication, and providing the environmental resources necessary for agricultural intensification. However, the conditions of the first millennium BCE are difficult to reconstruct precisely, given the considerable changes in drainage even within the historical period. The basin, after its lacustrine phase, was originally drained by the Tiber to the south, but this situation was reversed by a combination of tectonic, alluvial and human actions (Losacco 1944; Piccardi 1973: Figure 2). In the post-Roman period, the valley became virtually uninhabited and was only effectively drained by Fossombrone in the late eighteenth century (Rossi 1981). Prior to these changed drainage conditions, the basin appears to have been a very fertile area, although waterlogged conditions and small lakes were certainly already apparent, even by the late Etruscan period (Strabo *Geography* 5.2.9). At the southern end of the Val di Chiana, the calcareous peak of Monte Cetona provided an upland retreat for settlement, well withdrawn from the valley bottom and yet with good access not only to upland pasture but also to agriculturally more fertile terrain within a short horizontal distance. Intermediate positions, on the boundary of hill and mountain country of Pliocene and earlier date encircling the former lake basin and the more lowland Pleistocene terraces, proved to be very suitable for settlement where the population required higher degrees of intensive agricultural production. Finally, occupation of the interfluvies of the Pleistocene valley bottom allowed access to some lighter sandier soils and to lowland grazing in the most probably seasonally flooded and locally lacustrine valley bottom.

The Tiber has retained the modern catchment of the most southerly portion of the Val di Chiana including the area of Lake Trasimene. During its upper course, the river and its tributaries the Chiascio and Topino also drain the remaining intermontane basins of northeast Umbria. The most northerly of these basins (north of Città di Castello) is deeply filled to the west with Pliocene and Pleistocene alluvium, which forms a well-defined upland area some 100 meters above the rest of the remainder of the 10-kilometer-wide valley. The valley is less isolated than the Casentino, with a rather greater potential for economic intensification; nevertheless, except for access from the

south up the Tiber valley and a natural pass through the Apennines some distance to the north, the area was surrounded by fairly rugged mountains on all sides. The connecting valleys and basins to the south, forming the main access route to the Upper Tiber, are smaller and dominated by mountains of up to 1000 meters on either side. These peaks are most impressive immediately to the north of Perugia, where the limestone formations project through the sandstone and marl deposits that otherwise form the major geological formations of northeastern Umbria.

Two broad basins stretch south from Perugia towards modern Todi and Spoleto. The potential conditions for economic development in these basins are broadly similar to those of the Val di Chiana except in one important respect: they lie a further 50 kilometers east. Both basins have extensive recent alluvial plains which probably required modern technology for effective exploitation although, in the case of the Todi basin, without the drainage problems of the Val di Chiana. Extensive Plio-Pleistocene deposits flank the two sides of the Todi basin, and the western side of the Foligno–Todi basin; these sandy–clay conglomerates were most likely rather less suitable for early cultivation, and in the 1940s, they were covered with scrub (Mason 1944a: 319). As in the other basins of Umbria, prominent limestone peaks break the sandstone marl formations that provide the next structural level of relief.

A continuous line of limestone peaks forms the eastern flank to the Umbrian basins, broken only by several stream-induced passes, and, occasionally, by upland plateaux, most notably that of Colfiorito. This limestone chain overlooks a major communication route through the Apennines later followed by the Via Flaminia. One basin (Gualdo Tadino) runs parallel to this line of communication. The last basin (Gubbio) is reached either along this communication route from the east or from the Upper Tiber to the west. The key local topographical feature is a prominent limestone escarpment, in part the watershed of the peninsula, that runs the length of the northeastern edge of the valley, reaching an apex of nearly 1000 meters at the central point behind the city of Gubbio. This escarpment dominates a valley at between 300 and 500 meters, filled with heavy Pleistocene terraces, later alluvial fans and colluvial infill. A large proportion of the alluviation and colluviation was probably a consequence of human activity dated substantially to the Republican period when rural settlement increased considerably. As a consequence of the central infill of the valley, drainage takes place both to the southeast and the northwest, ultimately reaching the Tiber from two tributaries. To the southwest lie the lower sandstone marl hills between Gubbio and the neighboring city of Perugia. The whole valley forms a self-contained territory flanking the higher Apennines and the major communication route through to the Adriatic followed by the Via Flaminia to the east.

Upland peaks, predominantly of limestone, but also of the upper range of the sandstone and marl, were important topographically in this mountain landscape. These positions offered defense and control, forming a potential nexus of political foci within visual contact with each other, or potential ritual outposts under conditions of political stability. Many of these uplands could have formed areas easily cleared of a climax vegetation of mixed oak woodland (Allegrucci et al. 1994) to form pasture. The many natural territorial units enclosed by these upland peaks also formed, as explained above, natural political units, under the appropriate political conditions. Lower colluvial/alluvial slopes and fans were often present against the flanks of these peaks, providing more accessible, but still not valley bottom, positions for more complex centers.

The Volcanic Landscape of Southern Etruria

The volcanic area of central Italy is the largest expanse of rock of volcanic origin in continental Europe. The recent geological processes involved affected both positively and negatively the availability of resources and shaped the structure of the landscape that could be exploited politically. The developmental sequence of volcanism in central Italy involves a complexity of which, fortunately, only the most recent part is of direct relevance to the present discussion. Three volcanic provinces (Alvarez 1975: 387) exist in central Italy: the Tuscan (which lies to the south of the Tuscan upland around Monte Amiata), the Roman and the Campanian. The northerly Tuscan is earlier in date (nine to one million years ago) and represents a phase of only minor volcanism with shallow plutonism of an anatectic type (Alvarez 1976: 312), consisting of small intrusions and volcanic bodies of calcalkaline composition (Alvarez 1975: 357). A major change occurred about one million years ago when the chemical composition of the volcanic activity became potassic, and two new provinces, the Roman and the Campanian, replaced the first. The Roman province is itself divided into four districts: from north to south, they are the Vulsinii, Vico, Sabatini, and Alban complexes. Each of these has, at its center, one or more crater lakes. The Vulsinii district contains Lake Bolsena (114.5 square kilometers and 146 meters deep) while Vico has a lake with the same name (40.95 square kilometers and 48.5 meters deep at a relatively high elevation of 507 meters above sea level). The Sabatini district is made up of a grouping of 20 to 30 craters of which three would have been filled with water in the first millennium BCE: Bracciano (67.5 square kilometers and 160 meters deep), Martignano, and Baccano. These volcanic lakes trapped sediments containing pollen which reveals a relatively late post-Etruscan clearance of their fairly steep slopes (Bonatti 1963; Frank 1969; Kelly and Huntley 1991). The date of the cessation of volcanic activity is difficult to determine, but appears to be in the order of 40,000 years ago

(Evernden and Curtis 1965; Alessio et al. 1968; Bonadonna and Bigazzi 1970). The importance of the volcanism is therefore in terms of its effect on the evolution of the landscape and the provision of resources rather than a direct effect on daily life. However, the grouping of these lakes conveniently formed a border zone between inland and coastal cities.

The major processes after the deposition of the last major ash flow tuffs were those of fluvial erosion and deposition. In the Sabatini province (occupied by Civita Castellana, Nepi, and Narce, amongst other centers), the east–west streams had a gentle effect on the landscape, but the north–south ones cut deeply into the volcanic strata. The erosion revealed a succession of permeable and impermeable deposits that produced numerous springs and, along the north–south axis, canyons of c.100 meters deep, which divided the terrain. Numerous mesa-like “pedestals” for isolated and defended settlement were formed. The smaller of these were occupied in the Final Bronze Age and Medieval periods. The larger of these were occupied by the primate centers of the Archaic Etruscan period. In certain areas, the preceding parent rock surfaces from under the more recent volcanic deposits. The coastal area is backed by Pliocene clays, marl, and sandstone and to the south of Civitavecchia by harder sandstones; these represent a continuation of the type of geology found further north, providing similar constraints.

The result of this rapid succession of recent geological and geomorphological activity was a considerable range of resources including soils of very different potential. Parent rocks of calcareous, sandstone/clay origin are found, as well as a considerable variety of volcanic deposits. The most fertile (Migliorini 1973) of these are some of the less compact tuffs, which contain the minerals suitable for intensive cultivation. Reworked and redeposited volcanic tuffs are also of high fertility. However, a larger area is covered with more compact volcanic deposits that are better suited for pasture and less intensive agriculture. In addition, the variety of stratified deposits provided rich sources of raw materials. Pliocene clays exposed even in the volcanic areas in the river bottoms were used for house floors (Potter 1976: 51), pottery, and tiles; the limited work carried out on pottery fabric from sites such as Narce (Potter 1976: 186) shows a clear continuity in clay sources, except for the distinctive imports. The tuffs, and, by the later periods, the travertines, provided easily cut stone for construction, and in the case of the softer deposits, tombs and sometimes dwellings within the deposits themselves.

3. Conclusions

This overview combines an understanding of the geopolitical position of Etruria, whose maritime integration underpinned one major facet of its economy, with the main structural features of its landscape, within which

were found the agricultural and mineralogical resources that underpinned two other of its important economic facets. The human landscape (see [Chapter 5](#)) imprinted itself on this nexus of sea and land. Some landscapes of cities, like that of Cerveteri, were relatively restricted, but exploited proximity to the sea and a major river to look outwards. An inland city like Veii, on the other hand, was more expansive on land, and agriculturally based. The landscape of Tarquinia mapped almost perfectly onto the river catchment of the Marta, whereas Chiusi, Cortona, and Arezzo shared the intermontane valley of the Chiana. The relationship between the cities and their physical landscape was as varied as their identities measured by material culture.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Braudel 1972 is set in a different age (that of Philip II), but still provides a good sense of the importance of geography in the ancient Mediterranean world. Broodbank 2013 provides the prehistoric version of Braudel for the whole Mediterranean. Mason (1944–45), written during war and reflected in the tortuous advance of the Allies through the peninsula some seventy years ago, still represents the best geographical study of the Italian peninsula, while Brown 1997 is an excellent resource for those interested in more specific

analyses of the Etruscan landscape. A. Sestini's chapter in Embleton 1984 provides a good synthesis of Etruria's structural geology, and Walsh 2014 includes information on the interactions between humans and the environment in the ancient Mediterranean from the Neolithic to Roman periods.

CHAPTER 5

City and Countryside

Simon Stoddart

1. Introduction

The manner in which humans populated the central Italian landscape underwrote all that is considered Etruscan by any definition, and yet this has remained the less studied component of their understanding. The first work on all relevant periods dating from the early Bronze Age to Romanization has tended to concentrate on the collection of intact museological material culture, preserved in caves for the earlier periods and in cemeteries in almost all other periods. The revolution in regional survey has radically changed our understanding of the human landscape, and this has been enhanced for the later urbanized periods by the increased excavation of the urban centers. However, whereas the prehistorians and protohistorians have excavated the rural settlement of the unurbanized landscape that by definition lacked the urban foci, there has not been the same level of interest in the rural settlement of the full urban periods. A simple, and uncostly, investment in the excavation of rural settlement with proper scientific sampling of their economies, would rebalance our understanding of the lived world of the Etruscans by investigating their support structure and establish, on an effective basis, the linkages between city and countryside.

2. Countryside

In spite of this tilted research record, some key elements of the outline patterns of the relationship between the long-existing countryside and the emerging city can be established in the region that came to be designated as Etruria. The settlement organization of the region of Central Italy enclosed by the Arno to the north, and substantially by the Tiber to the south and east underwent a major transformation between the late second millennium and the middle of the first millennium BCE. The key consideration is a tipping point of demographic focus from a dispersed farmstead landscape in the middle of the second millennium BCE into a highly nucleated landscape by the end of the millennium. The major debates relate to the rate of change of this development (Stoddart 2010). For example, did these dramatic changes take place over the course of a generation or even in the lifetime of a few powerful

individuals? Was this change the product of a collective action such as intimated by a literal reading of some of the funerary ideologies (see also [Chapter 1](#)) or implemented by the agency of a military elite whose privileged access to power and resources was masked by democratic material culture? The evidence drawn from the human landscape permits both interpretations, while the addition of material culture permits some alternative solutions.

In the early Bronze Age (Bietti Sestieri 2010), the settlements are largely poorly known and it is difficult to form a satisfactory overview of the human landscape. Caves (Romita di Asciano and Fontina) and open sites (Querciola and Lastruccia) are known in the northern part of the region (Tuscany) and appear to favor lacustrine and fluvial locations. In the central part of the region, some sites, such as Luni Tre Eri, were already located on naturally defended positions. In the south, we have to turn to what was later Latin territory south of the Tiber to uncover a similar pattern from a distribution of some 34 known sites in valley bottom, coastal, lakeside, cave, and rock shelter locations. The best economic evidence comes from Querciola and Tre Eri, both of which suggest mixed agriculture with a strong pastoral dimension.

The quality of the evidence increases slightly at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, in the phase usually designated Grotta Nuova. The preferred locations of these sites were coastal (Paduletto di Coltano in northern Tuscany, Malpasso, Marangone, and Torre Chiaruccia in northern Lazio), and away from the coast on riverbanks and lakesides (Mezzano, Bracciano, and Baccano), while, at the same time, beginning the trend towards defended locations that became so prominent in the later phases of the Bronze Age. From the better excavations outside the immediate area of Etruria, we can infer small circular or oval huts with beaten clay floors, and small pits and hearths, arranged in small villages, sustained by a substantially domesticated livestock (cow, sheep/goat, pig, horse, dog, and perhaps even chicken), cereals (barley, wheat, spelt, oats, and rye) and legumes (vetch). An interesting discovery from San Lorenzo a Greve near Florence is of the storage of grapes, both morphologically wild and cultivated, and dogwood, in a combination that suggests the preserved ingredients of an alcoholic liquid. Faunal studies, moreover, suggest the increased momentum towards a pastoral economy dominated by sheep and goat, and the appearance of horse.

In the full Middle Bronze Age, it is difficult to assess whether the lower density of settlement in the northern (Tuscan) region, compared with northern Lazio, is a result of less detailed research or a statement of reality. In Tuscany, the main evidence appears to be some continuity of occupation in rock shelters (e.g., Castiglioni and Ambra della Candalla) from earlier periods. By contrast, northern Lazio has been subjected to a systematic judgmental survey of prime locations (naturally defended tuff outcrops) in a repeated and focused manner (di Gennaro and Barbaro 2008) over many decades leading to a comprehensive understanding of the occupation of – *at least* – these predicted

locations. Although numerous sites are known, two major problems surface: firstly, whether untargeted locations have been missed, and secondly whether the Recent Bronze Age phase (Cocchi Genick 2004) is also underrepresented, because of the very restricted handle form that provides dates for the phase and which may be recovered less frequently on the surface (as opposed to in excavation). While acknowledging these biases in the evidence, the overwhelming character of this phase, and one that continues into the later Bronze Age, is the steady concentration of sites away from the coast onto naturally defended positions on tuff outcrops of between 1 and 10 (or a maximum of 15) hectares, often between two streams. A number of these locations – such as Luni sul Mignone (Östenberg 1967), Monte Rovello (Toti 1976) and Monte Roncione (Fugazzola Delpino and Delpino 1979) – have been investigated in more detail. The site of Luni sul Mignone extended over an area of 5 hectares, and three reasonably well-preserved elongated rock cut structures were found in the Swedish excavations. Monte Rovello is famous for its large rectangular hut measuring some 15×7 meters. In spite of the latter's size, there is, at this stage, no clear evidence of emerging political supremacy of one site or group of sites over another, and site selection was still varied, since it included lakesides (Mezzano, Martignano, and Bracciano) and coasts (Malpasso, Marangone, and Torre Chiaruccia) as in the previous phase. The dominance of open sites is considerable, but some cave sites also persist (e.g., the Faliscan caves and Grotta Misa). During this period, the populations of the future Etruscan areas tended to specialize in raising sheep/goat and to a lesser extent in cow.

The final Bronze Age was the immediate platform from which the dramatic geospatial changes took place that led to the formation of the fully Etruscan landscape, an identity closely linked to state formation and urbanization. This was also the phase when central Italy differentiated itself most clearly from southern and northern regions of the peninsula. Central Italy maintained a steady political trajectory, visible above all in the lived spatial experience of the populations, that contrasted with other regions of the central, and most of the wider, Mediterranean (Mathers and Stoddart 1994). Some authors see the “collapse” of the *terramare* as contributing demographically to the success of central Italy (Bietti Sestieri 2010: 225), although the supposed effect is seen most clearly in the southern part of the future Etruria (that is, modern Northern Lazio). The southern part of the peninsula (outside Etruria) was also less stable, perhaps because of the temporary breakdown of its intense relationship with the Eastern Mediterranean, whereas in central Italy, eastern Mediterranean connectivity was much less intense and local contact with Sardinia was more important (see further, [Chapter 1](#)).

The settlement organization in northeastern Tuscany (and crossing into Umbria) took the form of clusters of settlement around high limestone peaks in the landscape. The most notable example of this type in the future Etruscan

area is that of Monte Cetona. In this location, the Vetta or peak (Martini and Sarti 1990a, b; Cipolloni 1971; De Angelis 2001), as well as cave and open sites (Casa Carletti: Calzoni 1936; De Angelis 1990; De Angelis 2001) on the flanks of this very prominent landmark, were all occupied in what must have been a polyfocal agglomeration of cooperating populations. As work progresses, it has been shown convincingly that other more lowland locations, such as Chiusi itself (Bettini 1988), were also occupied by this period in what may have been a similar polyfocal cluster. What is interesting is that, at this stage, the same phenomenon was taking place in neighboring areas that were not later defined in terms of identity as Etruscan (Bruni 1983; Malone and Stoddart 1994) and only later differentiated into what scholars characterize as either Etruscan or Umbrian. Further west, in the area of modern Lucca and Grosseto, some open sites in less defended but developed locations include Capannori (Ciampoltrini 2008) and Scarceta (Soffredi and Poggiani Keller 1999).

A decisively different settlement system was present in the southern area of the central Italian Tyrrhenian region. The pre-eminent settlement location was a volcanic, interfluvial, tuff outcrop of a size generally between one and two hectares but sometimes reaching 15 or perhaps even 20 hectares. Some of these locations have been substantially excavated, and, although often reoccupied in full Etruscan or medieval times, the natural defenses appear to have been reinforced by a ditch or wall in some cases, even if reworked in later times. The choice of location was not exclusively defensive, and, as already remarked, the evidence may be severely affected by targeted research strategies. In any case, smaller sites have also been found on gentle lower-lying slopes, as demonstrated by Torrionaccio (Cassano and Manfredini 1978), one of the most closely investigated sites, and by other sites in coastal or lakeside positions. The most recent analysis of this key issue shows both the trend towards defensive positions (51 percent of 169 sites in a highly defended position), even if a very substantial number (35 percent) were placed in locations where defense seems to have been a low priority (Barbaro 2010).

Some of these sites have been excavated in sufficient detail to reveal some understanding of the settlements' organization. The earliest excavations were undertaken by Swedish scholars of sites at both the smaller end of the scale (San Giovenale (3 hectares)) and at the more substantial end of the scale (Luni sul Mignone (8 hectares)). The first (1957–61) revealed many structures including at least two clearly understandable huts (area D) of oval shape, indicated by channels and postholes and beaten earth floors (see further, [Chapter 10](#)). The second excavations (1960 onwards) revealed a central monumental structure (albeit reinterpreted by some as an animal processing area) and more peripheral living areas. A special mention should also be made of British excavations close to the river Treia at Narce, because, although the upper layers were made up of erosional deposits, the lower levels revealed in

situ post holes that represent an extension of the settlement beyond the obviously defended area (Potter 1976); additionally, the excavation was at the time one of the few that demonstrated a palaeoeconomy also focused on the raising of sheep (Barker 1976).

The major breakthrough, however, has come with the highly interdisciplinary excavations of Nuccia Negroni Catacchio at Sorgenti della Nova, which is variously given as having a defended surface area of 5 hectares or a surface area of as many as 15 hectares by the excavators (Negroni Catacchio 1981, 2006; Negroni Catacchio and Cardosa 2007). Most importantly, this research excavation has continued without interruption since 1974, bringing to the study, geological, paleoenvironmental and paleoeconomic analysis with an intensity that has been not seen on such a scale elsewhere in the region for the period. This intensive analysis has brought excellent results. Firstly, there appears to be zoning of the settlement. On the summit of the typical topography of a tuff outcrop, there were subcircular and square huts. On the artificially terraced sides there were large ovoid huts whose limits were revealed by channels cut in the bedrock, as well as supplementary supports from posts (revealed by postholes). In addition, there were cave-like structures cut back into the rock face, with evidence of shelters in front. As a result, a diversity of different structures has been identified (Dolfini 2002): smaller huts (between 12 and 14 square meters) cut into the bedrock, larger huts (up to 20 × 11 meters in size), one principal example of a monumental building and rock-cut caves. Within these, some of the spatial organization was revealed by the placing of ovens, hearths, storage, and apparently deliberate ritual deposits. The domestic economy seems to form a balance of sheep, cattle, and pigs, although the prominence of the latter may be influenced by ritual activity.

A number of authors see the disposition of these sites arranged in a series of nested microsystems of increasing scale (Barbaro 2010). The lower-order microsystems seem to form coherent landscapes of the living and dead. The higher-order systems seem to show evidence of coalescence around the later Villanovan and Etruscan centers of Vulci, Tarquinia, Orvieto, Cerveteri, and Veii, all of which have evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation either within the later urban area, or in a very closely associated settlement (e.g., Isola Farnese and Veii). The study of Tarquinia's plateau is particularly interesting because the differentiation of the phases of Final Bronze Age shows an expansion of occupation from La Castellina onto other parts of the plateau (Mandolesi 1999: 135). For many scholars, particularly from the protohistory school of Rome founded by Renato Peroni, some of the areas of denser demography (e.g., the Fiora, Marta, and Mignone catchment) appear to have a group of smaller sites (of a few hectares) dependent on one larger site (of 10–15 hectares) (di Gennaro 2000). This model has softened the tipping points between a dispersed village landscape, very substantial nucleation, and the

subsequent assertion of primacy of a much smaller number of centers in the full Villanovan period.

An absolutely crucial issue is the tempo of this change. Did it take place over the lifetime of one individual, and thus was there a conscious agency involved? To what extent were the participants conscious of the radical changes that can be seen from a longer archaeological perspective? Was this change the product of the agency of a small number of individuals or a collective cooperative action taken perhaps under difficult political and economic conditions (Stoddart 2010)? Many of these debates can only be resolved by the development of a more refined chronology, and furthermore a chronology that can be applied to settlements as effectively as to cemeteries and metalwork. The specialists in this work have worked out increasingly fine slices of time even for settlement dates (which rely on pottery rather than metalwork); this has advanced so far that the subdivisions of the final phase three of the Final Bronze Age could be as short as a generation. When distributed as time-slices on the landscape as human geographies, they show a progressive centralization into fewer locations (Barbaro 2010: 114–117). The human geography of Final Bronze Age 3B, the final stage, however, still left a substantial step for the demographic and political move into the almost exclusive occupation of the later urban plateaux in the first phase of the Villanovan.

As emphasized above, the transition from the final phase of the Bronze Age into the Villanovan Iron Age remained dramatic, at least in South Etruria where the pattern is better known. However, although Orvieto, Bismantova, Vulci, Tarquinia, Cerveteri, and Veii were all substantially occupied, with local variations, the surrounding “countryside” was not always completely abandoned by this demographic pull to the center (Pacciarelli 2000: 128–136). In the Faliscan area to the north of Veii, the effect was dramatic and almost absolute, and all smaller villages were abandoned, leaving a zone of unoccupied territory in the Treia valley. By contrast, between Cerveteri and Vulci, notably along the coast, but also in the Monte Tosto area just to the northwest of the main Cerveteri plateau, a cluster of sites continued into the first phase of the Villanovan Iron Age. The imposition of central power was not absolute and perhaps beyond the institutional organization of the period. In any case, in the second phase of the Iron Age and, particularly during the Orientalizing period, the countryside (now in the proper sense contrasted with an urban center) was recolonized, and some of the larger examples some distance from the largest urban centers developed their own independent power, at least for a period.

A number of the Villanovan plateaux, such as Tarquinia (Mandolesi 1999), Vulci (Pacciarelli 1991), Cerveteri (Merlino and Mirenda 1990) and Veii (Cascino, di Giuseppe and Patterson, 2013) have been subjected to detailed surface survey, supplemented by excavation where agricultural activity has

permitted preservation. There has been much debate about whether these resultant distributions represent one continuous occupation of a proto-urban settlement or whether they show retention of some differentiation from the Bronze Age communities that presumably provided the constituent populations. All the distributions are discontinuous, at first sight a large number of smaller and larger concentrations, but this could be judged to be the product of site-formation processes, including the subsequent loss of evidence. However, when these subcommunities are put in connection with the separate cemeteries that surround all Villanovan communities there is a good argument for continuing subidentities within the broader communities which continued as separately buried descent groups, in the subsequent full Etruscan period. Heterarchy, or competing constituent power blocks, rather than hierarchy, appears to have been the political model of Etruscan cities from their very beginning. However, protohistorians of both the Milan and Roman schools tend to emphasize the immediate unity of these new nucleations.

Knowledge of the living structures of the Villanovan period is much less good. This relates to the simple fact that archaeologists are now dealing for the first time in the history of central Italy with the lower (and often artistically less appealing) levels of urban centers. In the preceding “rural” world of the Bronze Age, there is simply less stratigraphy (if any) to remove. Some of the best Villanovan evidence, unsurprisingly from this stratigraphic perspective, comes from a part of Tarquinia that later became a cemetery, and thus lacked a deep overburden. In the Calvario area of Tarquinia some two hectares of a larger settlement area were excavated and revealed a combination of larger oval and smaller rectangular huts (Linington 1982). A second and more exceptional example was found under water in Lake Bolsena where well-planned wooden piles were preserved (Tamburini 1995). Elsewhere, the combination of postholes and cut features are more difficult to reconstruct in meaningful terms although they have been discovered at Orvieto and Cerveteri and over a broader area at Veii (Bartoloni 2007–2008, 2009; Bartoloni and Acconcia 2012). In recent excavations a series of circular and oval huts have been found on the Piazza d’Armi at Veii that in one case was substituted by a later square structure. A similar range of information has also been found in the Campetti area of the city. The situation in the northern part of Etruria, and projecting into Umbria, is somewhat less well known, although Villanovan is known from all the major centers, such as Vetulonia, Chiusi, and Perugia.

The nucleation of the Villanovan period produced a political geography that underwrote all later developments in Etruria until the Roman conquest. However, it would be an exaggeration to simplify the picture. The Etruscan cities were not all of equal size or located in the same size of territory. For this reason the relationship between city and countryside that followed was very

different in each and every case, and – as other chapters in this volume relate in cultural terms – each city and countryside had an explicitly different character, a different identity founded as much in human geography as in material culture. The cities and their cultural identities are well known (see [Chapter 7](#)), but unfortunately their countrysides have been less well studied. This leaves open the question for future research as to whether the rural populations had the same identities and allegiances as their urban neighbors. With these issues in mind, the rest of this chapter will attempt to explore this diversity, taking in turn the urban territories where there is some evidence.

3. The Rural Landscapes of Urbanism

Cerveteri was one of the most powerful cities of Etruria, reaching a size of some 160 hectares, but because of her geopolitical position in the landscape she never achieved a substantial size of territory (with perhaps a cap of 750 square kilometers). The consequence of this position, hedged in by the Tiber and the Latins to the south, Veii to the northeast and Tarquinia to the northwest was that there was a direct relationship between primate city and its countryside, unmediated by smaller nucleated centers of intermediate size, except towards the frontier with Tarquinia. A very substantial field survey has been completed of her territory showing the dense occupation of the landscape reaching more than one farmstead per square kilometer some four kilometers from the urban center (Enei 2001). It could be argued that the sea became part of that territory, and it is no accident that Cerveteri had considerable power overseas at its peak, including a presence at Delphi. Maritime connectivity outside the city was encouraged by its small terrestrial base, and Cerveteri was known as a major center of innovation in areas such as literacy (see further, [Chapter 14](#)).

By contrast, Veii, to the northeast, was much more expansive. This larger urban center of some 190 hectares was located in a less constricted political space, albeit truncated in its activity by Rome which has similar expansionist ambitions from across the Tiber to the south. Mathematical modelling suggests that the size of Veii's territory could have reached more than 2500 square kilometers if it had not been kept in check by the power of Rome. There is some controversy over how much expansion Veii did manage to achieve before 396 BCE and the fall of the city at the hand of Rome. Although expansion to the south was held in check by Rome and Cerveteri, there is a very probable case that Veii had substantial political control over the Faliscan territory to the north, even if this region had a separate linguistic and cultural identity. Until recently, and for a long time, it was thought that a rural farmstead had been excavated in this very territory as early as the late 1960s (Torelli, Ward-Perkins and Murray-Threipland 1970) even if the published

evidence related mainly to ceramics. Unfortunately, this self-same “agricultural establishment” has been recently reclassified as a “rural sanctuary” by the only surviving author of the original report (Torelli 2001). There remains the possibility that the site is some blend of the two interpretations, since the combination of loomweights, saddle querns, and animal bones may belong to the sphere of ritual embedded in daily life. Some evidence that seems to have remained consistent from studies of the same period is the unusual intensity of agricultural drainage with *cuniculi* of the Veii territory, suggesting a substantial agricultural base for the activities of the city (Judson and Kahane 1963), a point confirmed by the density of farmsteads discovered in the immediate region of the city by the British School at Rome (Kahane, Murray-Threipland and Ward-Perkins 1968; Patterson et al. 2000; Patterson, di Giuseppe and Witcher 2004) and by the analysis of their agricultural potential (Schiappelli 2013).

The territory of Tarquinia to the northwest illustrates another distinctive variation on the theme of human geography. This 150-hectare site was centrally located within the catchment of the Marta river, providing an almost perfect mapping of a political territory onto a geographical framework which could have reached as much as 1500 square kilometers. To the south, the Tolfa mountains, enhanced by sanctuaries such as Punta della Vipera, demarcated the southern boundary with Cerveteri. To the north, the boundary with Vulci coincided with the Arrone river (in part symbolized by sanctuaries). Inland, there was relatively more space for expansion since the territories of the inland cities of Etruria lined up on the volcanic lakes of Vico and Bolsena (see [Chapter 4](#)). As a consequence, the territory of Tarquinia had a number of small towns that lay in size between the major urban center and the rural farmsteads. The territory of one of these, Tuscania, has been intensively surveyed, showing that this same small town had its own cluster of rural settlement (Barker and Rasmussen 1988) surrounded by less densely occupied areas. Unfortunately when one of these rural settlements was excavated, modern agricultural activity had destroyed most of the evidence for its layout, and the geological conditions had not permitted the preservation of bones or seeds (Grant, Rasmussen, and Barker 1993). Nevertheless, the excavation conveyed the type of material culture – including bucchero, pithoi, loomweights, transport amphorae, whetstones, and grindstones – that might be expected in rural communities of this period.

Ironically the best knowledge of the rural countryside is known from the unstable frontier zone of the Albegna valley between the major city of Vulci to the south and the twin cities of Roselle and Vetulonia to the north. This region is unusual because the focus of urbanism switched from the Marsiliana d’Albegna (45 hectares) to Doganella (200 hectares) over the course of the Etruscan period. An important analysis of this region (Perkins 1999) has shown convincingly that, in spite of this instability, the valley was

consistently and increasingly urbanized in the sense that the proportion of the urban population rose from perhaps 40 percent (if we include the new work on Marsiliana) to 70 percent of the total population in the territory, until collapse at the time of Roman interference. Two well-researched farmsteads exist from this political region. The first is Podere Tartuchino (Perkins and Attolini 1992), where excavation revealed two phases of a porticoed building and then an extended single-range structure dating to the turn of the sixth/fifth century BCE (Figure 5.1). This site gives a very good idea of the material culture that reached the rural countryside, including bucchero, pithoi, loomweights, and even the sophistication of stone beads and *aes rude*, which are interpreted as storable and exchanged wealth. An extensive program of recovery of paleoeconomic remains was also undertaken, revealing a substantial concentration of grapes, wheat, and weeds, particularly from the environs of a large storage jar that has been interpreted as evidence of wine production at the level of the farmstead. Unfortunately, once again, the local geological conditions prevented the recovery of animal bones. A second important site of similar date, the Casa delle Anfore, has been investigated close to Marsiliana d'Albegna (Zifferero 2010). As the name suggests, considerable evidence for transport amphorae was found in the square single building at this site, as well as bucchero and dolia. Some of these containers were scientifically analyzed to uncover traces of organic markers of fish, olive oil, animal fats, beeswax, and pine resin.

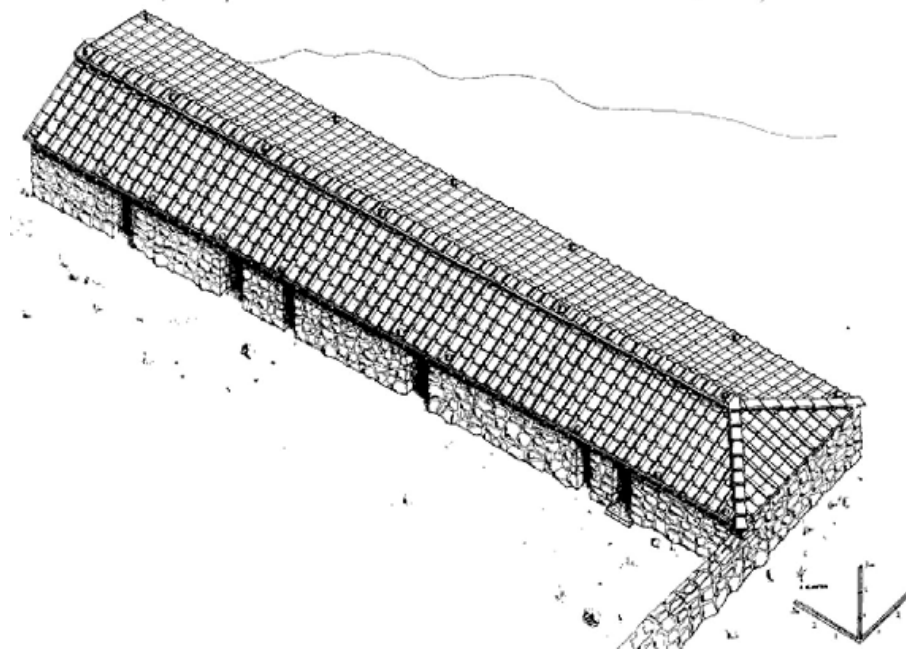


Figure 5.1 Reconstruction of an Etruscan farm at Podere Tartuchino, Phase 2, late sixth–fifth century BCE.

Dynamism was an important part of the urban landscape of Etruria even if it operated from the fixed points of nucleated population established in the Villanovan period. The substantial urban centers of Cerveteri, Tarquinia, and Vulci on the coast, combined with the similarly sized centers of Veii and Orvieto ranged against the Tiber brought pressure on the intermediate centers housed amongst the volcanic lakes of Southern Etruria. As a result of this pressure, the important urban centers of Acquarossa to the south and Bisenzio to the north were eliminated from the political scene in the course of fifth century BCE. A similar corridor of unallocated political space was emasculated in the course of the sixth century in northern Etruria, although the political opportunities in locations such as Poggio Civitate and Castelnuovo Berardenga took more the form of moderately dense rural settlement headed by a residential palace rather than a substantial nucleated center (see further, [Chapter 8](#)).

The political geography of Chiusi, the important city to the northeast of Etruria, is more controversial. The size of the city, originally considered to be as small as 30 hectares, has recently been considerably upgraded by some authors to a level much more in keeping with those of southern Etruria. However, a more nuanced reading of the evidence suggests that the political center of Chiusi was polyfocal, without the centralization on one plateau that is a feature of the more southerly centers. The northern inland area of Etruria clearly had a more decentralized landscape, including farmsteads which only really multiplied in the later Etruscan phases. One very late (130–80 BCE) but well-investigated example is Poggio Bacherina, where clear evidence of both wine and textile production have been detected (Paolucci 1992).

The irony continues that most comprehensive understanding of the rural economy of Etruria comes from its extreme limits in the Mugello and on the northern limits of Perugia and the Etruscan world. The substantially ritual site of Poggio Colla (see further, [Chapter 12](#)) has produced an important faunal collection, as well as some evidence of carbonized seeds (see further, Trentacoste 2013). The small village of Col di Marzo (Malone et al. 2014), simply by dint of the interdisciplinary approach applied in the excavations, has also provided some of most comprehensive evidence for nonurban life amongst the Etruscans, showing the prominence of low-grade meat and soup, where products such as better cuts of meat, cheese, textiles, and perhaps wine were extracted by the city elite.

4. Conclusion

This brief survey of the variations in the rural landscapes of Etruria shows

how much remains to be undertaken. What is already clear, however, is that the relationships between the urban center and the countryside were as varied as the cultural patterns of each individual city. More interdisciplinary research needs to be undertaken on the rural infrastructure of Etruria to understand this vital component of Etruscan life.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Bietti Sestieri 2010 provides an excellent overview of the situation in the Bronze Age and Iron Age, within a broader peninsular context. Barbaro 2010 gives the most up to date and detailed account of the settlements of the Final Bronze Age. Negroni Catacchio and Cardoso 2007 provide a synthesis of the best excavated Late Bronze Age village. Di Gennaro 1986 remains the seminal study on the transformation of the human landscape from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Pacciarelli 2000 is the best study of the process of nucleation that took place between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Perkins and Attolini 1992 remains the most detailed study of an Archaic Etruscan farmstead, employing an interdisciplinary approach. Vanzetti 2004 provides a good overview of how the Rome school of protohistory sees the status quo. Enei 2001 is a good example of the potential of field survey for uncovering the rural landscape. Malone et al. 2014 shows the potential results of an interdisciplinary analysis of a rural village, albeit on the frontier of northeast Etruria.

CHAPTER 6

The Etruscans and the Mediterranean

Giovannangelo Camporeale

1. Introduction¹

Livy (*History of Rome* 5.33.7–8) preserves a tradition that ascribes great power to the Etruscans, not only on land but also on the seas.² In fact, the two bodies of water that lap the Italian peninsula on the east and the west – the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic, respectively – took their names from Tyrrhenus, the Etruscan patriarch, and Adria, an Etruscan colony founded along a northern tributary of the Po river delta. Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 7.57.209) transmits another tradition regarding Etruscan sea power: Pisaeus, son of the aforementioned Tyrrhenus, was first to outfit warships with the beaks that served to ram and perforate enemy vessels. These traditions, although legendary, reveal the high regard that Etruscan seafaring enjoyed among the ancients, especially the Romans. Nonetheless, with a few exceptions, the Etruscans, unlike the Greeks and Phoenicians, founded no colonies along the Mediterranean coast; these would have provided an idea of their routes and the points of exchange for their products (for an overview of this subject see Camporeale 2004a).

The Mediterranean area is where the greatest ancient civilizations flourished, or at least those that have had the greatest impact on the world of today; the Mediterranean Sea, in particular, was a venue for trade, piracy, naval battles, and fishing, all activities with profound political, economic, and social implications, distinct today but often interrelated in antiquity (Figure 6.1). For example, in the first centuries of the last millennium, piracy was still practiced on occasion by wealthy merchants as a way of procuring means of subsistence for the weak, and was, therefore, considered an honorable rather than a shameful activity (see Homer *Odyssey* 3.68–74; Thucydides 1.5.1). The shipwreck from the island of Giglio (discussed further below) also contained a variety of goods and fishing weights, suggesting combined activities of commerce and fishing. Beyond doubt, the most common seagoing operation was trade, whether exchanges between aristocrats in private quarters governed by rules of hospitality and reciprocal gifts (the Homeric *prexis*), or commerce in public places such as sanctuary-emporia (from the end of the seventh century, when the Etruscan city develops as a political, administrative, and urban entity capable of founding and organizing such places). Trade involves a movement of people and objects, each of them the bearer of experiences,

ideas, and tastes. And thus commerce becomes the prime mover of a process of acculturation.



Figure 6.1 Map of the Mediterranean.

Drawing: Camporeale 1992: 45.

These events presuppose the availability of products, both raw materials and manufactured goods, which enter into a long-range circuit. The raw materials are tied to the resources of the soil and those beneath the soil; in the specific case of Etruria, the most important are the products of agriculture (grains, wine, oil, fruit, vegetable fibers), animal husbandry (meat, skins, cheese, wool), wood (used in construction, naval carpentry, and fueling for “industrial” ovens), fish, salt, minerals, and metals. Manufactured products are tied to these same raw materials, worked to create objects both useful and valuable in daily life. These products brought the Etruscans into a network of commercial and cultural relationships with various peoples settled in the Mediterranean basin, some of them more advanced culturally (e.g., the Greeks, Phoenicians, and Syrians), and some less so (the Sardinians, Celts, and Tartessians). Movement by sea requires, in turn, the existence of landings (bays, river mouths, lagoons, harbors, ports, and their infrastructures), which become the areas of exchange and cultural relations, and roads that connect the site of production of exportable goods (in surplus), and that of their distribution, or, conversely, the point of arrival of imported goods and the point of their consumption. It is no coincidence that ancient writers explicitly note that the price of a product at the moment of consumption depended on the existence (and quality) of these roads (see Varro *Agricultural Topics* 2: proem 5). For the sake of completeness, it must be said that the products listed above also opened Etruria to peoples beyond the Alps, who sent objects and craftsmen down south and, in turn, received Etruscan objects and craftsmen, again with a series of social, economic, and cultural consequences.

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to establish some preliminary points in order to facilitate understanding of the situation to be illustrated in what follows: Etruscan civilization develops in a time frame that ranges between the end of the tenth to the beginning of the ninth centuries and the first century; hence any conclusions must be related to a precise historical moment and not generalized. Along with Etruria proper, the Etruria of the Po Valley and the Etruria of Campania must be kept in mind, the former lapped by the Adriatic Sea and the latter by the Tyrrhenian, and both involved in movements within the Mediterranean (see [Map 1](#)). In addition, because the political and administrative organization of ancient Etruria consisted of city-states, the movements of people and goods in the Mediterranean must be tied to individual cities and not to an imaginary global Etruscan nation. The coastal centers clearly projected their interests outward toward the Mediterranean more than the inland centers did; thus when ancient writers mention Etruscan involvement in Mediterranean events, even when they do not explicitly say so, they are to be understood generally as referring to the Etruscans of the coastal centers.

2. Sources of Evidence

Archaeological Finds

Our sources of information about the Etruscans and the Mediterranean are both direct and indirect. Primary sources include shipwrecks (a considerable number) ([Figure 6.2](#)) with Etruscan materials discovered in the waters of the western Mediterranean basin (for an overview see Long, Pomey and Sourisseau 2002), Etruscan inscriptions and/or products found in the countries of the Mediterranean area, as well as inscriptions and/or products of the same area found in Etruria. Shipwrecks sometimes have homogeneous cargoes, as is the case for those of Cap-d'Antibes (central decades of the sixth century) and Grand-Ribaud F (end of the sixth-beginning of the fifth century), loaded mostly with large Etruscan amphorae of wine and Etruscan ceramics or bronzes associated with serving wine, probably of Caeretan origin. Other wrecks have a mixed cargo, like those of Bon-Porté and Dattier (second half of the sixth century), which carried East Greek, Sicilian, Etruscan, and Massiliote wine amphorae. For the vessels with homogeneous cargoes, the point of departure (Caere) can be established; for those with mixed ones, it is impossible. Furthermore, the former vessels are of considerable size (the amphorae loaded on board number several hundred), while on the latter, they are small (a few dozen amphorae). It would seem to follow that the first type of vessel undertook long voyages from a precise point of origin to a precise

destination, and the second type belonged to a small-scale operation departing from a major port and redistributing the merchandise among various localities along the coast (see also Long et al. 2002: 47, 49, 64; Morel 2006: 33).



Figure 6.2 Plan of the underwater excavation of the wreck of Cap d'Antibes, mid-sixth century BCE.

Drawing: Camporeale 2001: 90 (top).

This hypothesis, if correct, permits us to pinpoint certain aspects of the way in which maritime trade took place in the ancient Mediterranean. It is crucial,

both with the archaeological sites outside Etruria and with shipwrecks, to try to establish an exact percentage of Etruscan products compared with those imported from the outside or of local production, in order to reconstruct a more accurate picture of the maritime trade in Etruscan products, and, more precisely, to determine whether this movement was managed by Etruscan shippers or shippers from elsewhere. In effect, the presence of Etruscan material outside Etruria does not mean that it must have been transported exclusively by Etruscans; it could also have been transported by Greek or Phoenician ships making landfall in an Etruscan port before moving on to other sites. Some scholars have argued that because the Cap-d'Antibes shipwreck yielded a lamp of Punic type, it could have belonged to the Punic fleet, but similar lamps are fairly common in Caeretan tomb groups, both imports and local imitations of Punic models, suggesting that the lamp in this wreck could have been purchased on the Caeretan market. In any case, this evidence does not contradict the proposal (noted above) that the ship departed from Caere under the aegis of a Caeretan shipper.

The shipwreck from the island of Giglio (end of the seventh–beginning of the sixth century) has yielded merchandise of various types: amphorae and fineware from several East Greek workshops, Corinthian fineware and aryballoi, a bronze helmet of Corinthian type, Lakonian pottery, lamps of Greek type, a Phoenician-Punic amphora, kantharoi of Etruscan bucchero, and large Etruscan amphorae, some of which contained olives, Etruscan copper and lead ingots, wooden auloi, fisherman's weights, arrowheads, unworked pieces of amber, and writing materials (Bound 1985, 1991). An Eastern Greek shipper has been proposed (Cristofani 1998), but this conjecture is by no means secure. It is also uncertain whether the ship made a long voyage, landing at various Mediterranean ports to load and unload merchandise, or whether it departed from an Etruscan port to redistribute the goods in other ports along the Tyrrhenian coast. The evidence gathered so far points to one basic consideration: ancient Mediterranean commerce must be analyzed in terms of geography rather than ethnicity (Gras 1985b: 158; 1989: 760; 2002: 15; Moscati 1985).

Another point to bear in mind is the context in which Etruscan material is found in a foreign country: tomb, house, or sanctuary. In the first two cases, especially if the materials are in common use and of poor quality, they could belong to Etruscans who had emigrated; in the case of a sanctuary, they may reflect an occasional visit by an Etruscan. The presence of Etruscan inscriptions in a foreign country, on the other hand, especially if they indicate the ownership of an object or come from a settlement or from tombs, indicate a stable Etruscan presence. In all of these cases, the transfer has taken place by sea and is linked to work or commerce. The overall situation, however, is neither uniform nor schematic; rather, because it is rich in particular nuances that change from instance to instance, individual findings turn out to be much

more useful than generalizations.

Literary Sources

Indirect sources include data reported by ancient Greek and Latin authors writing on a variety of subjects. Our task is neither to accept such information passively nor to reject it preemptively, but rather to put it into historical context: that is, to define the time and setting in which the writer who reports the testimony lived, his political and religious orientation, the public he meant to address, whether he speaks from direct knowledge or at second hand from another source. After an analysis of this sort, the use of a piece of evidence will offer a more concrete and valid basis for judgment in reconstructing a historical setting.

The information that ancient writers transmit about Etruscan penetration into the Mediterranean has already entered the realm of historical legend. The Argonauts, after having sailed up and down the Aegean basin and the Black Sea in search of metals – the poetic version of the myth tells of conquering the Golden Fleece, guarded in Colchis by two fire-breathing bulls and a dragon – arrive in Etruria and land on the island of Elba, where they found the city of Port Argo, named after their ship, and Telamon (Talamone) on the Tyrrhenian coast, both areas rich in mines (Hec. ap. *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium* 4.259 = *Fragmenta* 21 Nenci; Tim. ap. *Fragmenta Graecorum Historicorum* 566 F85; Apollonius Rhodius 4.654–658; Lyc. 877–886; Strabo *Geography* 5.2.6 C224). This last detail is consistent with the general sense of the myth, which characterizes the various participants in the expedition as prospectors for metal. In terms of relative chronology, the myth refers to the generation immediately previous to that of the Trojan War, considering that the Argonauts include the fathers and uncles of the Greek heroes who fought at Troy (e.g., Peleus, father of Achilles). Thus, the original myth refers to a period before the formation of the Etruscan people. Evidently, the addition of an Etruscan coda to the story derives from a time after the discovery and exploitation of the metal mines of Etruria, which attracted entrepreneurs, prospectors, and merchants from various areas of the Mediterranean to this region.

Among the theories of the Etruscans' origins current in the ancient world (see, most recently, Bagnasco Gianni 2012; Bellelli 2012), those recorded by Hellanicus (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.28.3) and Herodotus (1.94) refer the event to the period immediately after the Trojan War and maintain that the Etruscans arrived from the Aegean basin to the Adriatic Sea. Indeed, according to Hellanicus, the Pelasgians, expelled from northern Greece, arrived at Spina on the upper Adriatic, and from there reached Cortona; afterwards they founded the cities of Etruria, changing their

name from Pelasgians to Tyrrhenians (=Etruscans). According to Herodotus (the theory is not his; he heard it in Lydia and recorded it), the Etruscans were Lydians. In order to survive a famine that had plagued their region for years, they took to the sea under the guidance of Tyrrhenus in order to seek out new lands, reaching the land of the Umbrians (ancient Umbria, it is important to note, extended as far as the Adriatic Sea). There they founded cities.

No matter how we evaluate the historical basis of these two stories, which pose the question of Etruscan origins in terms that are no longer acceptable, it is worth emphasizing that both are transmitted by Greeks writing in the fifth century, who insist that the Etruscans arrived in Italy by sea, and, more specifically, the Adriatic Sea – that is, the waters frequented in that century by Greek ships trading with the Etruscan emporia of Adria and Spina. Presumably the two theories were developed in a Greek setting with the clear intention of celebrating this setting as giving rise to a people that had produced wealth pursued by an active commerce in the Mediterranean area. To these theories, we can add that of Anticleides (end of the fourth century), who claims that the Etruscans were Pelasgians, under Tyrrhenus, who left the island of Lemnos for Italy (Strabo *Geography* 5.2.4 C221). This is clearly a theory that combines its two fifth-century predecessors, and hence must have developed after they had already taken hold, as it reinforces the connection between the Etruscans and the Mediterranean from the very beginning of their history. The models for these theories are to be sought, on one hand, in the *Nostoi*, the homecoming tales of the Greek heroes who fought at Troy, and on the other, in the Greek colonial movement, in which a numerically important group of individuals with a founder (*oikistês*) at their head left a Greek city to settle on a new site in the Mediterranean. These indicate that these theories emerge from Greek historiography (see Briquel 2004; Camporeale 2004c).

3. The Etruscans in the Mediterranean: A Chronological Survey

The dawn of the historical period gives rise to another account reported by ancient sources that projects Etruria into the Mediterranean: Ephorus (Strabo *Geography* 6.2.2 C267) relates that Greek colonization of the eastern coast of Sicily, which goes back to the third quarter of the eighth century, was slowed because of Greek fear of the Etruscan pirates who made incursions into the Mediterranean. In all probability, this account mirrors the situation in Ephorus's own time when, (as discussed below), the Etruscans did indeed ply the seas as pirates – a situation then projected back into the remote past. In support of this explanation, it is important to note that (presumed) Etruscan

pirates are never mentioned as an obstacle to Phoenician settlement of the western part of Sicily in the eighth century (Thucydides 6.2.6).

The earliest archaeological remains at the Etruscan site of Pontecagnano, in the immediate hinterland of Salerno, can be dated to the beginning of the ninth century. Many distinctive characteristics of this center's culture in its most ancient manifestation, from the biconical cinerary urns with a single vertical handle and a cover in the form of a pileated helmet, to the bronze swords with their geometrically decorated sheaths, can be compared to material found in the coastal centers of southern Etruria. This implies a movement of persons and/or things by sea.

The Villanovan Period

In the period currently termed Villanovan (ninth–eighth centuries), Etruscan tomb groups include objects from overseas starting from the very earliest phase. Examples include a mirror of Aegean-Cypriote manufacture found in a *pozzetto* tomb at Tarquinia, or the many products of Sardinian manufacture in bronze (e.g., statues, small models of baskets, *tintinnabula*, conical “buttons” surmounted by a bird, models of *nuraghe*, pendants of various kinds, daggers) or impasto (e.g., pitchers with elongated, off-center necks) recovered in tombs from various sites along the Tyrrhenian coast between Pisa and Pontecagnano. This movement intensifies in the central decades of the eighth century, as manifested by finds such as a Phoenician bronze cup with repoussé animal friezes from a tomb in Vetulonia (Maggiani 1973), a little Phoenician wide-bellied ceramic jug from Tarquinia (on the type see Culican 1970), a Cypriot bronze basin with handles decorated with a lotus flower from a Vulcian tomb (Kriseleit 1988), Egyptian faience scarabs from several Etruscan centers (Hölbl 1979: *passim*), and a Phoenician bronze cup with two bull friezes from Montevetrano in the territory of Pontecagnano (Jannelli 2013: 130, n. 75.4).

Various explanations have been suggested for the presence of these exotic artifacts: exchanges, movements of individuals, marriages in which the foreign partner has brought along a typical native object as a personal memento or as a wedding gift. The explanations vary according to the nature of the object and the context of its provenance. The usual foreign protagonists are the Phoenicians, the great navigators of the Mediterranean in the first centuries of the last millennium, interested essentially in the metal mines of southern Spain, mines that produced gold, silver, copper, and iron of good quality and in great quantities (Strabo *Geography* 3.2.8 C146). Imports to Etruria, few in number and precious in manufacture, involve the wealthy stratum of local society, which begins to emerge in the course of the eighth century and controlled the production of and the traffic in raw materials. This movement takes place, obviously, in the Mediterranean area.

A more specific analysis can be made of the first Greek vases that arrived in Etruria: the Geometric cups and kraters from Euboea that reach centers of southern Etruria and Campania in the middle decades of the eighth century. These vases are clearly distinct from the rough, locally produced impasto vessels, because they are made of refined clay, thrown on the wheel, and have good-quality painted decoration. They belong to a wine service. It is quite likely that they arrived together with the wine itself, probably transported in goat-skins (also used in banquets; see Varro *On the Life of the Roman People* 1.frag. 85 Riposati), given the fact that eighth-century wine amphorae have not been found in these contexts – and along with the ceremony in which the wine was consumed, the symposium, together with the associated aristocratic ideology. It is not out of the question to assume that the Euboean emporia and colonies in Campania were included in this movement. The island of Ischia (Pithekoussai), and Cumae, may not only have received these products from the motherland, but also redistributed them throughout Etruria. The mid-Tyrrhenian centers involved in this commerce are Veii, Rome, Caere, Tarquinia, and Vulci, which had commodities – salt, minerals, metals, and grain – that represented a fair exchange. The movement was not limited to trading manufactured items and raw materials, but extended to persons as well: to judge from the large quantities of Etrusco-Geometric vessels in local clay and crafted in Euboean technique with Euboean models of decoration, it seems likely that master potters came from Euboea itself to set up shop in Etruria.

Furthermore, because this is a production linked to the consumption of wine, it is also likely that wine was produced locally, and that along with the master potters came vintners, who grafted Greek wine-bearing shoots onto local wild grapevines, turning the latter into wine-bearing vines, and thereby ensuring a product that found good placement on the market. Significantly, the earliest Romans poured libations in milk at the time of Romulus and in wine at the time of Numa Pompilius, but this was wine obtained from the grapes of pruned vines (Pliny the Elder *The Natural History* 14.13.88; Plutarch *Numa* 14.7; on the question see Gras 1985a: 373– 381). Nor should we forget the fact that between the end of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh centuries, wine came from Euboea to Etruria along with the alphabet, an import that created a genuine cultural revolution (see further, [Chapter 14](#)). The movement from Greece toward Etruria, which is the same movement that led to the Greek colonization of southern Italy, is larger and more extensive than that from the Near East. In any event, in the final decades of the eighth century the major lines of communication are set, to be followed ever more intensively in succeeding centuries.

In the Villanovan period, works of Etruscan craftsmanship, especially in bronze, are appreciated in foreign as well as local markets: razors have been found on the other side of the Alps and in Sardinia, as well as what are

probably suits of parade armor (e.g., the crested helmets, spear points, laminated shields, bridles recovered from the great Greek sanctuaries of Delphi and Olympia (Kilian 1977; von Hase 1997, 1981, 1997; Herrmann 1983 (1984); Naso 2006a: 354–360; 2006c)). For these last items, it is difficult to say whether they were dedicated by Etruscans who visited these sanctuaries, or by Greeks who had acquired the goods in Etruria during business trips and offered them at the sanctuary upon their return home.

If we follow the second possibility, the Etruscans, even if they did not sail the Mediterranean themselves to Greece, would have had contact with Greek navigators – that is, with people who navigated the Mediterranean. The only explanation that can be excluded out of hand is that these offerings are war booty, both because they were evidently designed for parades, and because there are no accounts of wars between Etruscans and Greeks in the ninth and eighth centuries, nor any clashes over colonization.

The Orientalizing Period

Between the end of the eighth and the seventh centuries, the volume of trade between Etruria and other Mediterranean lands assumed massive proportions. A class of local entrepreneurs becomes firmly established, involved in the exploitation and commercialization of local resources, and ready to invest its profits in the acquisition of exotic luxury goods. This period is usually termed “Orientalizing” because of the arrival in Etruria of luxury products and skilled master craftsmen from the Near East and “Orientalized” Greece: these are the prime movers of a radical transformation of technology, style, taste, and ways of life that now distinguish Etruria from the previous two centuries (see further, [Chapters 2](#) and [23](#)). The so-called “princely” tombs of Etruria have yielded up enamel vases and statuettes from Egypt, cups in precious metal and ivories from Phoenicia, silver pitchers and bronze candelabras from Cyprus, ribbed bronze bowls from Assyria, great bronze cauldrons from Syria, and vessels of precious metal created in Etruria by masters from the Near East. All of these objects are connected with banqueting or with personal dress. The Phoenicians among the other Near-Eastern peoples remain the Etruscans’ partners in commerce, interested as always in acquiring metals from local mines.

Commerce with Greece also intensifies, although control over the traffic passes from the Euboeans to the Corinthians and to Eastern Greeks (Torelli 1981). Vessels for serving wine (kotylai, skyphoi, cups, oinochoai, kraters) and transporting wine (impasto amphorae) come from Corinth and various East Greek cities, along with containers for transporting oil (e.g., SOS amphorae) produced in Attica (Boitani 1985; Rizzo 1990). Perfume vessels arrive as well (aryballoi, alabastra, pyxides), destined for the grooming of

women, athletes, and the dead. Many of these vessels, both those for wine and grooming, become models for local Etruscan potters to replicate. This in turn implies a local production of wine, vinegar, and oil – basic ingredients for the preparation of perfumes and creams – which will be exported broadly throughout the Mediterranean (see the papers of various scholars in Verbank-Piérard, Massar, and Frère 2008, especially 97–141, 367–388). Etruria is also a destination for Greek master-craftsmen, who work for the wealthy local clientele. An emblematic case is that of Aristonothos, who must have set up a workshop in Caere where he signed a krater in 670–660 that was found at the site. The scenes depicted on this vessel mirror the life of the Etruscan aristocracy in the first half of the seventh century, a life projected outward toward the Mediterranean. One side depicts the blinding of Polyphemos by an Odysseus who presents himself as a wine merchant, while the other contains an armed battle between two ships. Presumably the vase, intended for a communal ceremony like a banquet, was commissioned of a (cultured) foreign master craftsman with the clear intent of referring to activities that took place at sea and glorifying the owner. In the final decades of the seventh century, other vase painters followed the example of Aristonothos, but worked at Vulci: they include the Painter of the Bearded Sphinx, of the Corinthian school, and the Swallows Painter, of the Rhodian.

As noted above, the Greek products now coming into Etruria originate in large measure from Corinth or East Greece. There are similar echoes in the historical tradition. Demaratus, a rich merchant of Corinth fallen into disgrace at home for political reasons, moved to Tarquinia in about 657, accompanied by artists (Cornelius Nepos ap. Pliny the Elder *The Natural History* 35.5.16; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 3.46.3–5; Strabo *Geography* 5.2.2 C219; Pliny the Elder *The Natural History* 35.43.152). Kolaïos of Samos, in about 638, also made a voyage of exploration in the western basin of the Mediterranean, venturing beyond the Pillars of Hercules and reaching the marketplace of Tartessus on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula, where his crew acquired merchandise to be sold in Greece for a handsome profit (Herodotus 4.152.14). Finally, for the lack of an assured supply of products, the Phocaeans, Eastern Greeks themselves, frequented the markets of the Adriatic, Etruria, Iberia, and Tartessus (Herodotus 1.163).

It is important to note the establishment, over the course of the seventh century, of an artistic production in Etruria executed by masters who use models and assimilate experiences from a variety of sources – Near Eastern, Greek, and transalpine, thereby providing hints as to their identity (see further, [Chapter 24](#)). In the first half of the seventh century, Etruscan society is open to the foreigners who come from across the sea, but their integration is not uniform; the potter and vase painter Aristonothos, who, as discussed above, probably set up a workshop at Caere, remains Greek inasmuch as he retains his Greek name and signs his work in Greek (Martelli 2000a, with

bibliography). Demaratus, although he marries a noblewoman of Tarquinia, is only partly assimilated into local society because neither he nor his son (the future King of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus) take an Etruscan family name. On the other hand, Rutile Hipocrates, documented in an Etruscan inscription incised on the foot of an impasto pitcher (*Thesaurus Linguae Etruscae* 155), is a Greek who transformed his personal name, Hippokrates, into a family name and is therefore totally assimilated.

In the meantime Etruscan craftsmanship – stimulated, most likely by foreign models – achieves notable technical and stylistic advances; its products begin to appear among overseas and central European clients. In the great Greek sanctuaries, the offering of Etruscan goods, mostly bronzes, continues; examples include cauldrons and thrones in Olympia (Herrmann 1983 [1984]; Camporeale 1986 [1988]; Strøm 2000; von Hase 1997; Naso 2006a: 360–366), and *situlae* and belt buckles at the Heraion of Samos (Kyrieleis 1986; Naso 2006a: 360–362). Unfortunately, the identity of the dedicators remains uncertain. This must be the period to which Pausanias (5.12.5) refers when he mentions the dedication by the Etruscan king Arimnestos of a throne to Zeus in Olympia. Otherwise, according to a report of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* 3.46.3), the Corinthian merchant Demaratus, already mentioned above, returned to Greece with Etruscan goods after having brought Greek merchandise to Etruria. This account finds eloquent confirmation in an archaeological discovery datable to two or three decades after the career of Demaratus: the storeroom of a potter along the street leading from Corinth to the port of Lechaion, where Etruscan bucchero vases have been found alongside Greek vessels (Macintosh 1974), certainly artifacts imported en masse for sale in situ. It is also significant that a bucchero kantharos has been discovered in the nearby sanctuary of Perachora, bearing a dedicatory inscription in Greek by a Greek (*Nearchos anetheke*): the piece must have been bought locally, used for a religious ceremony in the sanctuary and left there as an offering to the deity (Dunbabin 1962: 385 n. 4126, pl. 160). This example is not unique; another similar inscription exists in the sanctuary of Athena at Ialysos on the island of Rhodes, though it is unfortunately limited to three letters because of the vessel's fragmentary state (von Hase 1997: 317–318).

Other clues to Etruscan seafaring come from painted imagery: ships and maritime battles are themes that enjoyed great popularity in the Etruscan decorative repertory of the seventh century. One of the oldest painted tombs of Caere, the Tomb of the Ship, datable to the mid-seventh century, contains the depiction of a ship, possibly referring to the profession of the deceased, while on the Tragliatella pitcher (also from the neighborhood of Caere and datable between the third and last quarter of the seventh century), we see a helmsman taking his leave of his family, followed by a retinue of armed warriors that probably constitutes a private army and evokes ideas of a

military expedition or a pirate raid.

The Archaic Period

From the last decades of the seventh century onward, Etruscan commerce in the Mediterranean takes place on a truly grand scale. Now the operations are no longer in the hands of a helmsman or an aristocrat who exchanges his goods with others of his own social rank. Rather, the transactions take place in public, usually in a seaside sanctuary organized by a new political-administrative entity, or in urban centers, which had their first beginnings in Etruria in the ninth and eighth centuries and which reach their complete organic development in the last decades of the seventh century (see further, [Chapter 7](#)). The port and its associated infrastructures are one of the services that the city provides. Commerce itself, to use the Greek terminology, shifts from *prexis* to *emporía*.

The Etruscan products that enter into the commercial circuit are essentially wine and wine vessels, from the large transport amphorae to the types used for serving, dipping, pouring, and drinking. The first are of rough impasto, the second of bucchero or clay that has been refined and painted (Etrusco-Corinthian pottery), or of bronze (infundibula). Thus two kinds of production, linked respectively to agricultural and artisanal activity, merge in the same product and become the basis for an export trade that, from its starting point in Etruria, touches the entire Mediterranean basin, with a high concentration on the southern French and western Iberian coasts all the way to the Atlantic (Huelva). There is no record of this commerce in the historical sources. The Etruscan ports most directly involved in these movements are those of Vulci and Caere. The period ranges from the second half of the seventh to the fifth century, with a peak in the first half of the sixth century and a gradual decline from mid-century onward. This runs parallel with the development of viticulture in Marseille and the diffusion of Massiliote wine amphorae in the localities that once received Etruscan wine. The local product, clearly less expensive than the import because of low transportation costs, found ready placement in local markets despite its undistinguished quality, as Martial remarks a few centuries later (*Epigrams* 3.82.23; 13.123.2).

Massiliote amphorae have been found, among other places, in several Etruscan seaside sites (e.g., Pisa, Gravisca, Pyrgi), probably as exchange merchandise. The Etruscan supply lines are different for the western and eastern basins of the Mediterranean, and even within the western area, the northern sector differs from the southern. Large wine amphorae of Etruscan production, both for transport (more capacious) and for table service (less capacious), have been found at more than a hundred sites in southern France and eastern Spain, as well as along the Spanish Atlantic (Py and Py 1974;

Bouloumié 1979, 1982a, 1982b; Remesal and Musso 1991; Gori 2006; Gran-Aymerich 2006; Graells i Fabregat 2010). At various coastal sites in Provence and Languedoc, the quantity reaches several thousand. The function of the amphorae is for the ceremony of the symposium, and hence their presence implies the spread of this ceremony among the various sites. The existence of such massive exportation raises the question of what was offered in exchange: metals, salt, and slaves have all been suggested, but no proposal has gone beyond the stage of hypothesis. Most likely, the answer is not simple; all the possibilities suggested so far may be valid, and one does not exclude the others (as an introduction to the problem, see the contributions of Morel 1981, 2006). Certainly if Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History* 5.26) – writing a few centuries later, of course – declares that in Gaul an amphora of wine was bartered for a slave, he provides us with a clear idea of the kinds of exchange practiced there.

In Carthage, on the other hand, large amphorae have not been found, but numerous wine vessels have (Thuillier 1985; von Hase 1989). These could have been used in ceremonies where wine was consumed, but perhaps not Etruscan wine. It is worth noting that this situation occurs, in general, in areas of Punic influence, where Phoenician wine would be readily accessible. It should also be borne in mind that Etruscan perfume vessels – artifacts that testify to the production and exportation of Etruscan perfumes – have been found in considerable quantities in Carthage, Sardinia, and eastern Spain, whereas they are rare in southern France (Asensi 1991; Frère 2006). Thus, the distinct patterns of distribution of these two types of vessels in the Mediterranean basin reflect different lifestyles in different areas. While this general picture is based on archaeological evidence, it is also colored by these regions' excavation histories: in southern France, for example, the data come mostly from settlements, whereas in the other areas, it derives from tombs. Hence the picture might change if tombs were to be excavated in southern France.

In the excavations conducted at Marseille, a Phocaean colony founded around 600, copious amounts of Etruscan pottery – not only fineware but also coarse ware for the table or the kitchen – have been found in the vicinity of the Cathedral. This suggests a settlement of Etruscans engaged in the various operations connected with maritime trade (Sourisseau 2002; Marchand 2006). If this conjecture is correct, then it might pave the way to solving a long-debated question: were the Greeks or the Etruscans the conveyors of Etruscan goods? It may be prudent not to opt for a single solution: the two possibilities could easily coexist. However, an Etruscan settlement in the port area of Marseille or the testimony of Etruscan inscriptions found at coastal sites in southern France can be explained if the Etruscans are directly involved in seafaring. Nor should it be overlooked that different kinds of pottery, including Greek, bear Etruscan commercial marks (Johnston 1985), a fact that

inserts the Etruscans into a large-scale commercial circuit.

In the eastern Mediterranean basin, the bucchero kantharos, the vessel used for drinking wine, is widely distributed along the Greek coasts of the Ionian Sea (Ithaca) as far as Ras-el-Basit at the mouth of the Orontes (see Gras 1976; von Hase 1989); the findspots are sanctuaries, residential areas, and tombs. Infundibula are also not uncommon in sanctuaries: examples have been recovered from Olympia, the Argive Heraion, the temple of Athena at Lindos, the temple of Apollo at Rhodes, and the sanctuary of Demeter at Cyrene (on the question, see Naso 2006a: 388–396). Here, too, the transport vessels for wine have not been found, making it most likely that the Etruscan vessels were used in ceremonies with local wine.

During the sixth century, Etruria is the preferred market for Greek products, in particular for painted Attic vases, first black-figure and then red-figure, many of them true masterpieces and almost all of them wine vessels (amphorae, kraters, pitchers, dippers, and cups). Probably wine came along with them. The carriers are East Greeks, who also transport large wine amphorae from workshops on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor. In the last decades of the century, the carriers are Aeginetan. It is no coincidence that a Laconian cup was found at the sanctuary of Athena Aphaia on Aegina, dating from the third quarter of the sixth century, with an Etruscan inscription (Johnston 1993; Cristofani 1993 [1994]), nor that an anchor inscribed in Greek ([Figure 6.3](#)) has been found at the sanctuary emporium of Gravisca dedicated to Aeginetan Apollo by Sostratos (Torelli 1971: 56), a wealthy merchant from Aegina (Herodotus 4.152.3), or that many Greek vases from the final years of the sixth century found in Etruria bear the commercial mark, *So*, corresponding to the first two letters of Sostratos's name (Johnston 1979: 80–83).

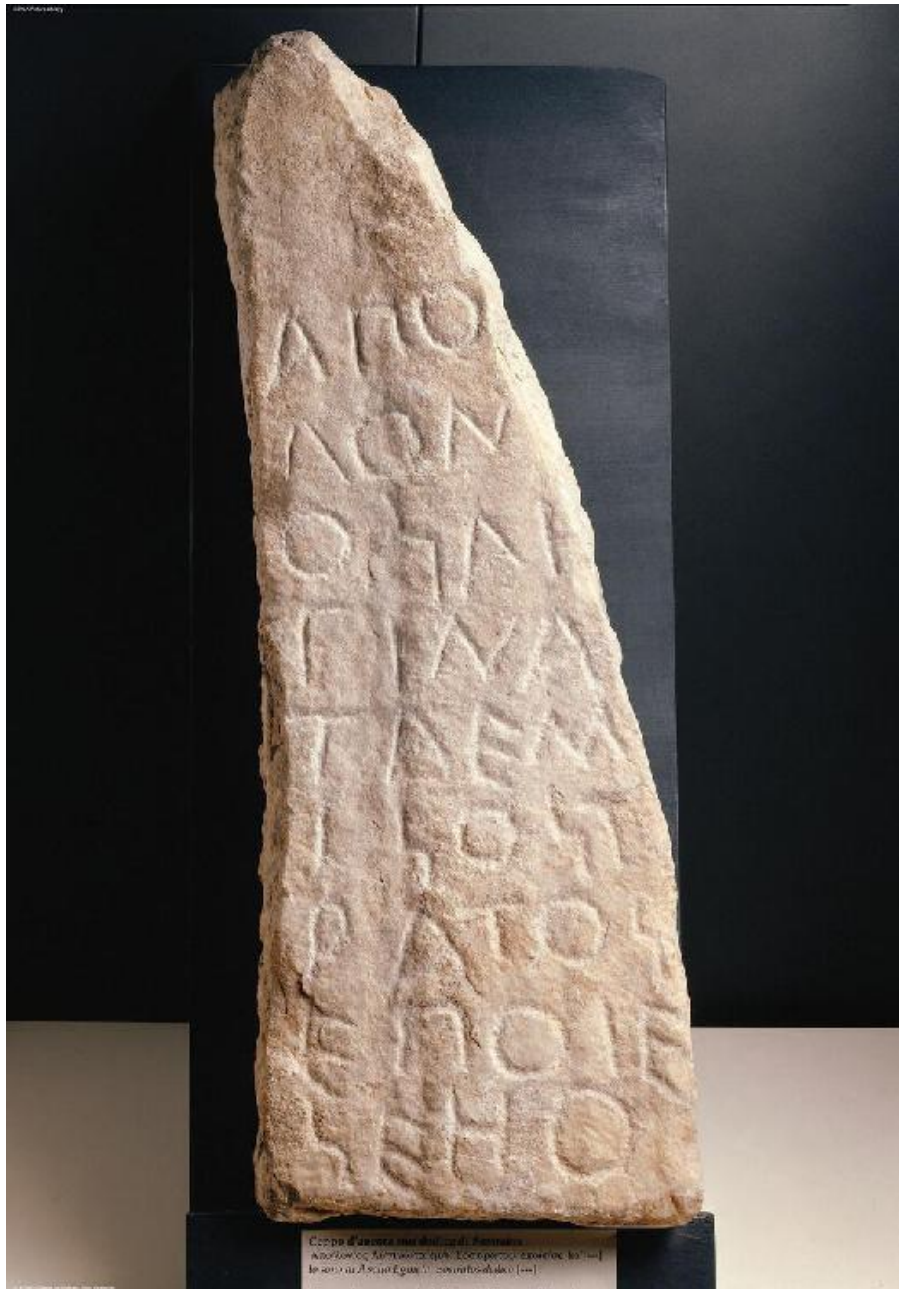


Figure 6.3 Cippus inscribed in Greek and dedicated to Aeginetan Apollo, end of the sixth century BCE. From Gravisca. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Etrusco.

Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Thus, Etruria, even if it produces (and exports) wine, continues to import this commodity from Greece, evidently because it is of a superior quality to that

produced locally. It is significant that the interior of an Attic cup by Exekias (c.540), found in Vulci, bears the image of Dionysus, the god of wine, sailing in a ship with a mast festooned with grapevines; its owner may have been a producer and merchant of wine, who wanted to portray himself as Dionysus. The same context would explain the myth of the kidnaping of Dionysus by Etruscan pirates who, terrified by the god, dive into the sea to save themselves; the myth, generated in a Greek setting, alludes to the Etruscans' unsuccessful attempt to seize control of the Mediterranean wine trade from the Greeks (see further, [Chapter 26](#)).

It is useful to remember that the Etruscan return is represented not only by raw materials like foodstuffs and metals, but also by handcrafts like the bucchero vases mentioned above (see further, [Chapter 15](#)), or the ivory and bone boxes found throughout the Mediterranean basin (Martelli 1985).

From the beginning of the sixth century, three powers control the seaborne commerce of the Tyrrhenian basin: the Phocaeans, the Carthaginians, and the Etruscans. The arrival of a group of Phocaeans in Alalia, a Phocaean colony on the east coast of Corsica, after the Persian conquest of Asia Minor (546), and the raids carried out on the island by the last to arrive, are the reason for the Etruscan alliance with the Carthaginians against the Phocaeans in the Tyrrhenian, in support of the Corsicans. The war will have its epilogue in the Battle of the Sardinian Sea, in which Etruscans and Carthaginians annihilate the Phocaeans' fleet, forcing them to abandon Corsica and find refuge first in Reggio Calabria and then in Elea (Herodotus 1.163–64; Ant. ap. Strabo *Geography* 6.1.1 C252; Diodorus Siculus 5.13.3–5). The Tyrrhenian basin also had well-defined lines of demarcation: the Etruscans controlled Corsica and were based in Alalia (which Diodorus Siculus will call *Karalis*) and in Nicaea, while the Carthaginians held Sardinia and the East Greeks the upper and lower Tyrrhenian (the Gulf of Lion, and Reggio and Elea, respectively) (on the question, with additional bibliography, see Giuffrida-Ientile 1983; Gras 1985a; Cristofani 1989; Domínguez Monedero 1991; Bernardini, Spanu, and Zucca 2000).

During this period, the Etruscans can be reckoned as a real sea power, especially the Caeretans, who, according to Herodotus, were the Etruscans responsible for the conflict with (and victory over) the Phocaeans in the Sardinian Sea. The wine trade with southern France also continues, as attested by the Grand Ribaud F shipwreck, recovered from the waters of Marseille, which contained about 1000 large wine amphorae of Caeretan manufacture. Moreover, between the last decades of the sixth and the first decades of the fifth century, the Caeretans adopted a pro-Carthaginian policy, especially at sea. An ivory *tessera hospitalis* found in a Carthaginian tomb has the name of a Carthaginian inscribed in Etruscan (*Puinel Karthazie*) ([Figure 6.4](#)). An analogous *tessera* found in Rome in the Area Sacra di S. Omobono likewise bears, in Etruscan, the name of a probable native of Sulcis (*Araz Siquetenas*

Spurianas), a Carthaginian colony on Sardinia, or perhaps someone so closely involved in business with Sulcis as to be identified as Sulcitan in “Etruscan” Rome. These *tesserae*, datable to the middle decades of the sixth century, clearly attest to the Punic presence in Etruscan markets.



Figure 6.4 Tesserae hospitalis with the name of a Carthaginian inscribed in Etruscan (*Puinel Karthazie*), mid-sixth century BCE. Ivory. From a tomb in Carthage.

Drawing: Maggiani 2006: [fig. 2.1](#). Reproduced with permission of Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon Srl.

The gold tablets of Pyrgi (produced at the end of the sixth century) likewise document a joint dedication (sanctuary? temple? statue? *ex voto*?) to Uni-Astarte on the part of Caeretans and Carthaginians, probably to seal a commercial accord, which implies the introduction of the Phoenician cult of Astarte into the sanctuary of Pyrgi and her assimilation to the Etruscan goddess Uni (Colonna 2010 and [Chapter 18](#) here). The presence of a text in Phoenician-Punic, designed to be fixed to a wooden support and read by visitors to the sanctuary, indicates that Carthaginians circulated freely here. Agreements of this sort must have been fairly common if, as Aristotle (*Politics* 3.9.6–7, 1280a) declares, by way of example, that through them different peoples can feel “like citizens of a single city.” It is the same principle that governs the first commercial treaty between Rome and Carthage in 509–508 (Scardigli 1991: 47–87; Colonna 2010). In these years, most probably, the Caeretans founded a treasury in the great Greek sanctuary of Delphi (Strabo *Geography* 5.2.3 C220).

The Classical Period

During the fifth century, the Etruscans of the coastal cities also maintain their maritime trade with southern France and eastern Spain. This is shown, for

example, by two Vulcian rod-tripods from Agde and Ampurias (Gran-Aymerich 2006: 257), the bronze wine vessels from the vicinity of Córdoba (Marzoli 1991), and the transaction for the purchase of a ship by Etruscans inscribed on a lead tablet from Pech-Maho. However, their chief objective was to extend their dominion over the lower Tyrrhenian. They also make expeditions to Lipari and the other Aeolian Islands, sometimes as victors and sometimes unsuccessfully, as is shown by the dedications offered by both the Etruscans and the Liparesians at the sanctuary of Delphi to honor their respective victories.

Etruscan artifacts have also been found in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean: a rod-tripod from Vulci was discovered on the Athenian Acropolis and there are bronze and gold furnishings that have been recovered from Athenian houses (Crit. and Pherecr. ap. Athen. I 28B; XV 700C). In any case, Etruscan naval power must have represented a real danger in the lower Tyrrhenian given that Anaxilaos, tyrant of Reggio, attempted to protect his city from the Etruscans with bastions and built a naval base in the Straits of Messina (Strabo *Geography* 6.1.5 C256). Likewise, Dionysius of Phocaea sailed to Sicily with a fleet to make pirate raids against the Carthaginians and Etruscans (Herodotus 6.17). These efforts, blocked by an expansion movement in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, aim westward, passing beyond the Pillars of Hercules in an attempt to occupy the “Happy Islands” (perhaps the Canary Islands) in the Atlantic, but the Etruscans are blocked in this effort by their own Carthaginian allies, who evidently began to worry about their ascendancy at sea.

In the years between the first and second quarters of the fifth century, Etrusco-Carthaginian domination over the Mediterranean basin is brought up short: the Syracusans first defeat the Carthaginians at Himera in 480 and then the Etruscans, initially in the waters of Cumae in 474 and then off the island of Elba in 453, victories that allowed them to become the dominant power in the western basin of the Mediterranean. The victory of Cumae is celebrated as the triumph of the Greeks over the Etruscans: at Olympia, the victor, Hieron of Syracuse, dedicated Etruscan helmets taken as war booty. The Syracusan presence alternates with that of Athens, which, by defeating the Persians at Salamis in 480, had become the dominant power in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. The Syracusans put into effect a plan, more economic than military, to strike a blow against the Athenians by blockading the ports of southern Etruria, which were the chief mercantile outlet for Attic crafts, and founding the colony of Portus Syracusanus on the eastern coast of Corsica to keep the central Tyrrhenian sea under its control.

The only Etruscan port left open to major traffic is that of Populonia in northern Etruria, inasmuch as it is a port for provisioning minerals and metals. Here high-quality Greek vases continue to arrive from the second half of the fifth through the fourth centuries, and it remains a stop on the so-called “port

route” followed by commercial vessels plying the Tyrrhenian (Martelli 1981). This was one of the points of departure for the (many) Greek and Etruscan wares found in tomb groups in Alalia (Jehasse and Jehasse 1973, 2001). The emporia on the Tyrrhenian coast continued to function, but only on a reduced scale. One indication is the hoard of nine Athenian and Sicilian coins offered in the sanctuary of Pyrgi at the time of the Peloponnesian War. This deposit should be ascribed to a Greek who frequented the ports of Etruria, or to an Etruscan who frequented the Greek and Sicilian ports and who had taken part in the attack on Syracuse (Colonna 1965). One sign of the critical condition of Etruscan seafaring is their participation, limited to three *penteconters* and a few cities, on the Athenian side in the siege of Syracuse (415–413) during the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides 6.88.6; 103.2). It is not clear whether this expedition or some other is the point of reference for a Latin inscription of Julio-Claudian date that mentions Velthur Spurinna of Tarquinia, who was apparently the first to lead an Etruscan army in Sicily (Torelli 1975: 30–38).

That the Etruscans were expert navigators on the high seas is indicated by the vessel portrayed in the mid-fifth-century Tomb of the Ship in Tarquinia, which – whatever its interpretation (about this see Colonna 2003 and, most recently, Petrarulo 2012) – displays a series of technical details that indicate real, rather than figurative, experience (Cherici 2006). Likewise, Theophrastus (*History of Plants* 5.8.3) reports that Etruscan ships were recognizable because their keels were made from the trunk of a single beech tree. These sailed the Tyrrhenian sea, but as mercenaries (Diodorus Siculus 19.106.2; 20.11.1; 61.6; 21.3) and as pirates (Diodorus Siculus 16.82.3), practicing a raider economy. The evidence is various: in 384 the Syracusans, in order to finance a war against the Carthaginians, sack the sanctuary of Pyrgi, procuring great wealth on the pretext that they are liberating the Tyrrhenian basin from Etruscan pirates (Diodorus Siculus 15.14.3–4; Pseudo-Aristotle *Economics* 2.1349b; Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 1.20; Polyaeus *Stratagems* 5.2.21). Later, in 325–324, the Athenians decide to send colonists to the Adriatic to protect their commerce from the Etruscans (*Inscriptiones Graecae* 2.1629), while in 299 the Delians invest thousands of drachmas in organizing their defense against Etruscan pirates (*Inscriptiones Graecae* 11.2.148.73: on the question Gras 1976: 361–363). Finally, perhaps in the third century the Etruscans, in their capacity as pirates, are paid by the Argives to steal the statue of Hera from the temple of Samos (Menod. ap. Athen. 15.672B–C).

If we return to the fifth century we find that the crisis of Etruscan seafaring on the Tyrrhenian coast is counterbalanced by the prosperity of the Adriatic maritime trade, connected with the ports of Adria and Spina, which already had relations with the Greek world in the previous century. These ports are the point of arrival for great quantities of painted Greek vases which were also distributed among the inland areas of Emilia and Lombardy, and the point of departure for grain from the Po Valley, and also, as has been suggested, for

minerals and metals from Etruria proper. Spina acquires great renown and such conspicuous wealth that, like Caere, it dedicated a treasury in the sanctuary of Delphi (Polem. ap. Athen. 18.606a; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.18.4; Strabo *Geography* 5.1.7 C214; 9.3.8 C 421; Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 3.20.120). The votive offerings of the latter may have included a *diphros* from the first half of the fifth century, for the bronze revetments of the feet, of an Etruscan-Padanian type, have been found in a votive deposit at the sanctuary (Naso 2006c: 373–374). It is indicative that c.390, Syracuse, continuing its program of striking at Athens through its export trade of local products to the Etruscan area, founds three colonies (Ancona, Adria, and Issa), which are located in a triangle whose corners are set on the eastern and western coasts of the mid and upper Adriatic to control commercial traffic. This political stance, and the descent of the Celts into the Po Valley, will lead, ultimately, to the decline of the cities of Padanian Etruria, and Spina, in particular, was reduced, by Roman times, to a modest village (Strabo *Geography* 5.1.7 C214).

The Hellenistic Period

In the last centuries of their civilization, the Etruscans never cut their bond with the sea: their activities in the Mediterranean, commercial and military, continued. Red-figure vases of the Volterra Group, superposed red-figure vases from the Sokra and Phantom groups, vases from the Genucilia Group, and Volterranean and Arretine black-glazed vases, were all exported to various sites in the western basin of the Mediterranean (Jolivet 1980; most recently Serafini 2008 [2009]; Morel 2009). Coins from the mint of Populonia have also been found in Alalia, Marseille, and Catalunya (Jehasse and Jehasse 1973: 545 n. 2310; Gran-Aymerich 2006: 256, fig. 12). The Hellenistic period coins from Populonia and Vetulonia have marine images on their reverses, such as an octopus or dolphins placed to either side of an anchor or a trident (Catalli 1990: 48; 82–84). An Etruscan mirror produced at the end of the fourth century was recovered from a tomb in Ampurias (Almagro Gorbea 1951), while a *krater tyrrhenikos* is listed in the inventory of the sanctuary of Delos in 280 (Naso 2006c: 370). From Gouraya in Algeria comes a *tessera hospitalis* from the third-second centuries in the form of a bronze disc with the name of an Etruscan (Larth from the *gens* Pumpu) (Briquel 2006). And some Etruscan cities donated marine supplies to the expedition in which Publius Cornelius Scipio confronted Hannibal in Africa: Tarquinia gave linen for the sails of the ships, Volterra ship frames, and Perugia, Chiusi, and Roselle supplied fir trunks to use for shipbuilding (Livy *History of Rome* 28.45.15–18). In several Etruscan centers on the Tyrrhenian coast, Iberian vases have also been found, made of gray ceramic ware and *sombrero de copa* (Bruni and Conde 1991). Furthermore, conspicuous groups of Etruscans

crossed the Mediterranean, at least to judge from the discovery of the *liber linteus* in Egypt and cippi with boundary inscriptions in the inland regions of Tunisia, texts directed at a vast public capable of reading Etruscan texts outside Etruria.

4. Conclusions

In short, the sea in general and the Mediterranean in particular did not impose a boundary on the Etruscans but, instead, opened various paths of communication, generating contacts and conflicts between them and other peoples, thereby creating rich cultural opportunities for all sides. In the second half of the eighth century, and on a larger, more conspicuous scale in the following centuries, goods, models, and masters arrived in Etruria over the Mediterranean from more culturally advanced societies in Greece and the Near East. These masters brought about a radical change that involved artisanal and artistic production, literacy, urban organization, lifestyle, and hence culture in its broadest sense. It is indicative that cities such as Caere, Tarquinia, and Vulci show evidence of a crisis between the fifth and fourth centuries, when the activity of their ports is blocked by Syracuse. In other words, Etruscan civilization can be described as a great civilization that linked its fortunes, for better or worse, to the sea.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Bartoloni 2012 is a work by multiple authors, who address different problems related to the Etruscan world in an introductory fashion. Berti and Guzzo 1993 is a catalogue of an exhibition on Spina, in which many finds from the site, several previously unpublished, are exhibited and catalogued; it also includes essays by various authors on visits to the Adriatic Sea in the last millennium BCE. Camporeale 2015 is a collected work on Etruscan civilization, which is divided into two sections: the first part addresses general issues, the second traces the historical development of various Etruscan cities; it includes many references to the sea. Cristofani 1989 is a scientific description, in light of the written sources and archaeological finds, of the various problems inherent in the relationship of the Etruscans with the sea. Gras 1985a deals with the problems of Etruscan trade in the early centuries of their history, and the commerce that took place, for the most part, by sea. Gras 1995 looks at the relationship between the various ancient peoples who lived in the Mediterranean basin. Heurgon 1969 provides a description of aspects of the everyday life of Etruscans, with diverse references to reports they had with other maritime peoples. Pettena 2002 concerns the commercial activities and military of the Etruscans in relation to the sea.

NOTES

¹ This chapter was translated by Ingrid D. Rowland.

² All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER 7

Urbanization and Foundation Rites

The Material Culture of Rituals at the Heart and the Margins of Etruscan Early Cities

Corinna Riva

1. Introduction

The origins of urbanism in Etruria and central Tyrrhenian Italy have been the concern of both Etruscology and the Roman School of Italian proto-history (henceforth abbreviated to proto-history)¹ since at least the 1960s, and largely, though not exclusively, centered on the origins of Rome and its chronology since Gjerstad established a sequence for the tomb groups of the Forum and Esquiline (Gjerstad 1956; Bettelli 1997: 19–35). Yet, over the proceeding 20 years, their views on urbanization and their interpretation of the archaeological evidence significantly diverged. This divergence began to soften in the 1990s when new evidence prompted a cross-disciplinary dialogue which led to a broad consensus on urban formation in Tyrrhenian Italy during the early first millennium BCE. These developments have gone hand-in-hand with studies, limited to English-speaking scholars, that have radically altered our understanding of Greek and Phoenician colonization following the post-colonial turn and the turn towards network thinking, which is exemplified by recent studies on the Greek world (Constantakopoulou 2007; Malkin 2011) and, more broadly, by the concept of connectivity (Horden and Purcell 2000; cf. Riva 2014). Thanks to these momentous changes we can now reconstruct the early phases of Etruscan urbanism in great detail. More recently, as a result of data obtained from new excavations, archaeologists have focused their attention on the evidence for rituals that occurred during these early phases, some of which they have interpreted as foundation rites. Today, we are able therefore to draw a detailed picture of Etruscan urbanization and its accompanying rituals; this is, in fact, the aim of this chapter, in which I will examine critically the evidence for these rituals. I shall first consider the scholarly history and the milestones in thinking that have occurred over the last 30 years before moving on to discuss urbanization as we understand it today.

2. From the Classicistic Prejudice to the Etruscan Non-polis²

The belief that central Tyrrhenian Italy underwent urbanization in the early first millennium BCE is not new. In a fundamental study of the chronology of Rome's burial groups, Müller-Karpe (1959; 1962) proposed that Rome was already a city in the eighth century BCE, grown from a nucleus in the Palatine and Forum area. Following Gjerstad's much-criticized Roman chronology, the seeds for an enduring debate on urbanization were sown. In 1960, Pallottino largely concurred with Müller-Karpe's proposal, but was doubtful that one could ascertain whether the urban settlement had formed out of a coalescing of autonomous villages or by the expansion of a core area. In fact, he considered putting one process against the other to be unhelpful given the complex topographical and spatial transformations leading to urbanism that peaked with architectural monumentalization and urban planning in the sixth century BCE (1960: 24–26; cf. Carandini 2006: 456–457).

Some years later, these concerns were extended to Etruria, particularly the urban plateaux of southern Tyrrhenian Etruria, which, from the 1960s, had increasingly become the subject of archaeological surveys and excavations producing new evidence on the topography and archaeology of some of Etruria's largest cities. Foreign teams were responsible for the earliest field projects that amplified an interest in the origins of Etruscan urbanism: these were the South Etruria survey coordinated by John Ward-Perkins and the British School at Rome (Potter 1979), in conjunction with the Italo-British excavation of the Quattro Fontanili cemetery at Veii, promptly published in *Notizie degli Scavi* (e.g., Fabbricotti 1976), and the excavations and field surveys of Acquarossa and San Giovenale by the Swedish School (Roos and Wikander 1986). The debate on urbanization enjoyed a renewed phase in the late 1970s as Etruscologists, proto-historians and ancient historians gathered at a seminar to discuss urbanism in Latium (Ampolo et al. 1980). This gathering also revealed deep disagreement among scholars, mostly between proto-historians on one side, and Etruscologists and historians on the other (cf. Guidi 1982; Ampolo 1983). The disagreement centered primarily upon the dynamics and, secondarily, on the dating of urbanization (Colonna 1983: 433; Peroni 1983). Without wishing to minimize the complexity of the debate, nor ignore scholars who embraced multiple viewpoints (Colonna 1983; cf. Carandini 1997: 458) and others who deplored inflexible positions (Cristofani 1986: 9), one may concur that the proto-historians argued for a long process of change beginning in the Recent and Final Bronze Age, leading to proto-urbanization in the Bronze–Iron Age transition (c.1000 BCE in the traditional chronology), and to settlement nucleation and synoecism, as it was first called (Peroni 1969: 157), and urbanization in the early Iron Age (Gnesotto 2006).

For proto-historians, the final phase of the Bronze Age was crucial; this is a period of fracture when many smaller settlements of Tyrrhenian Etruria were abandoned, and concurrently new, much larger settlements—the future cities—were occupied. Proto-historians called this new phase proto-urbanization, a term first applied to early Iron Age Italy by Renato Peroni (1969: 138, 157–158).

Etruscologists did not see the proto-urban phase as being key to later transformations, and considered these early Iron Age settlements on the future urban plateaux of southern Etruria as loose groups of habitation nuclei that were topographically and politically autonomous (Ward-Perkins 1959: 78–79; 1961: 22; Ampolo 1988; Cristofani 1986; Rendeli 1993: 223–226, 286–289). To the Etruscologist, only the unitary nucleated settlements of the seventh century with spatially or architecturally demarcated public areas could be truly considered as urban (Rendeli 1990, 1991; Steingraber 2001). To some of its detractors (Carandini 1997: 458, 463), this seemed to be a primitivistic outlook, according to which proto-urban settlements were closer to villages than to cities. These contrasting views are ascribed to the different scholarly traditions of each school and respective research fields, namely European prehistory and Classical archaeology. One should also consider the impact of Anglo-American evolutionary approaches to state formation and mathematical spatial modelling on Italian proto-history that, during the 1980s, brought some scholars to study the relationship between proto-urbanization and incipient state formation and the relationship between the future cities and their hinterland (di Gennaro 1982; Guidi 1985; cf. Riva 2014). Etruscologists, too, were concerned with this relationship, but in respect to the structuration of space through monumental and/or public architecture that became manifest between the end of the seventh and the early sixth century BCE. According to Etruscologists, this was the period when the city-state, with its own politically controlled and economically managed territory, was formed (Rendeli 1990; 1991; 1993: 348). If there was ever a model of urbanization for Etruscology, this was one based upon the Greek *polis* derived from ancient written sources (Ampolo 1988: 155), and archaeological studies on Greek urbanism (Snodgrass 1986), which, between the late 1980s and early 1990s, offered young Etruscologists a conceptual framework—peer polity interaction—for understanding urbanism (Rendeli 1991: 17). Hence, accusations of a “Classicistic prejudice” were brought against Etruscology (Carandini 1997: 455–456, 486–487).

While this debate centered superficially on the modes and chronology of urbanization, at much greater stake was the underlying issue of the role of outside influences on social and political change. Proto-historians saw the Bronze–Iron Age transition as a phase of radical fracture with the preceding social and political structures that was caused by internal social, economic and political transformations (Gnesotto 2006). Etruscologists, by contrast,

considered the impact of Greek settlements in the central Mediterranean as pivotal and a causal factor for the birth of Etruscan urbanism (Ampolo 1983: 429; cf. Rendeli 1991: 40). Such contrasting views began to soften during the 1990s: thanks to newly recovered material from urban sites, including Rome, and the proto-historians' involvement in fieldwork on the large urban plateaux of Tyrrhenian Etruria (e.g. Pacciarelli 1991a; Iaia and Mandolesi 1993; Mandolesi 1999) that had begun in the 1970s, the 1990s were marked by a growing cross-disciplinary dialogue that ultimately induced these contrasting views to converge. Partly responsible for this dialogue was the interaction between proto-historians who had studied early Roman material since the 1960s (Bettelli 1997: 20–23) and archaeologists of early Rome, particularly Andrea Carandini, who, in the 1990s, wrote a new narrative, not without severe criticism (cf. Torelli 2011: 24–30), on Rome's urbanization (Carandini 1997; 2006). An early indication of these developments was the publication of the exhibition catalogue, *La Grande Roma dei Tarquini* (Cristofani 1990), where Etruscologists, archaeologists of early Rome and proto-historians were brought together to examine the relationship between Archaic Rome, Latium and Etruria. Ten years later, another exhibition catalogue (Carandini and Cappelli 2000) testifies to the remarkable amount of new archaeological evidence recovered, and the consensus reached on the early processes leading to Etruscan and Roman urbanization (d'Agostino 1995; 2005: 21).

This new consensus had two important consequences: firstly, scholars acknowledged the unique and culturally specific dynamics underlying Etruscan urbanism, which were distinct from those of Greek urbanism; secondly, scholars recognized the diversity of these dynamics across Etruria (d'Agostino 1998). I shall now turn to these very dynamics and briefly discuss the origins of the Etruscan non-*polis* before considering the rituals associated with them.

3. Urban Networks and Diversity

As intimated above, the debate and final consensus mainly concerned the large urban plateaux of southern Tyrrhenian Etruria, namely Veii, Caere, Tarquinia, and Vulci. This is understandable given the concentration of research and fieldwork on these sites. It is only recently that sites located in the interior and further north, which underwent similar yet distinct transformations, have received equal attention. Scholars have now consequently recognized the diversity of Etruscan urbanization.

This diversity is firstly seen in the proto-urban phase. In southern Tyrrhenian Etruria, we see a contemporaneous extensive abandonment of Final Bronze Age sites and occupation of large plateaux; of the 70 known Final Bronze Age sites, less than 10 produced early Iron Age finds (Pacciarelli 1991b: 166–167;

2001: 104–109; Riva 2010: 18–19) (Figure 7.1). We have evidence of sporadic or more substantial Final Bronze Age occupation on some of these plateaux (Riva 2010: 13–18), but generally, save for Tarquinia and perhaps Vulci (Pacciarelli 2001: 162–164; Moretti Sgubini 2006), extensive occupation on these plateaux is new. In northern Etruria, we also see a proto-urban phase in the substantial occupation of areas that would be urbanized as well as cases of sites with Final Bronze Age activity such as Vetulonia (Pacciarelli 2001: 164).

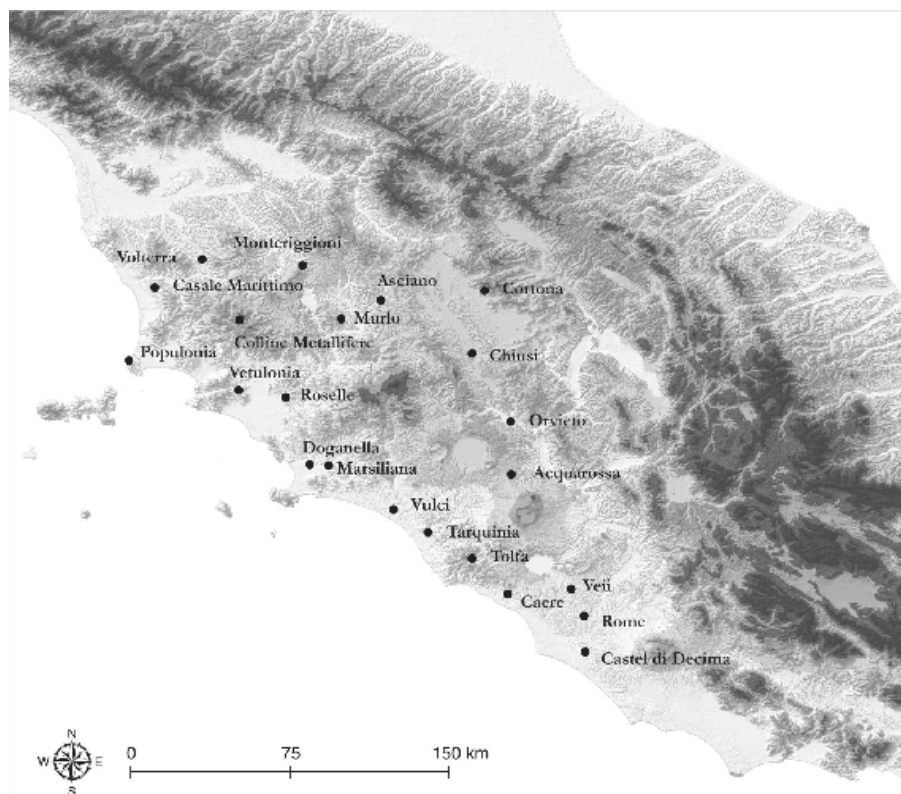


Figure 7.1 Map of Southern Etruria.

Drawing: Riva 2010: fig. 1.

Recent research, however, notably at Chiusi and Populonia, has demonstrated the diversity of this occupation, undoubtedly partly due to the different geomorphology of these sites. At Chiusi, Final Bronze Age occupation extended over 400 hectares and continued into the early Iron Age over five plateaux with the concurrent abandonment of others: here we have a rather fragmented occupation on smaller plateaux (Cappuccini 2008). Populonia's beginnings were not dissimilar from the proto-urban South Etruscan sites (Cambi and Acconcia 2011), but there, the topography of the site is distinctive: the town was located on a coastal promontory overlooking the Gulf of Baratti and facing the island of Elba. Final Bronze Age sites with brief

Iron-Age occupation are found along the gulf, while the earliest nucleus at the beginning of the Iron Age was located between three hilltops, Poggio del Telegrafo, Poggio al Castello and Poggio della Guardiola (Cambi and Acconcia 2011: 6).

The dynamics of the urban phase are similarly diverse. Southern Tyrrhenian sites occupied the vast, naturally defended tufa tablelands that were surrounded by smaller hillocks where the cemeteries developed in the early Iron Age and continued to be used in later centuries. In cases like Tarquinia (Figure 7.2), while the main settlement developed on the plateau of Pian di Civita and Pian della Regina, separate habitation clusters grew on the nearby Monterozzi plateau, where the future urban necropolis would flourish (Mandolesi 1999: 194–202; Iaia and Mandolesi 1993: 24). These clusters were abandoned at the end of the eighth century BCE when the area was used for burials only and the settlement concentrated on Civita and Pian della Regina (Iaia, Mandolesi, Pacciarelli and Trucco 2001; Bonghi Jovino 2005: 41). At Veii (Figure 7.3), early Iron Age structures have been uncovered in several spots on the main plateau, starting with the 1960s British excavation at the North-West gate (Ward-Perkins 1959) to the recent excavation campaigns run by the University of Rome (e.g., Fusco and Cerasuolo 2001). The latter have revealed the transition from hut structures dating as early as the ninth century to tufa block structures in the seventh century (D'Alessio 2001). At Veii, too, burial grounds were established on hillocks around the plateau from the end of the eighth century; the earliest cemeteries developed to the north and south of the settlement (Bartoloni 2001). Recent excavation, not far from the area investigated by Ward-Perkins, has uncovered a rampart, probably dated to the first half of the eighth century, constituting the earliest artificial defensive structure (Boitani, Biagi and Neri 2008). We see similar developments at Caere (Merlino and Mirenda 1990: 4–26; Maggiani and Rizzo 2001) and Vulci (Pacciarelli 2001: 36–58). The plateau of Vulci is mostly known from surface survey, although recent excavation near the Western gate has also revealed an earthwork dated to the middle or second half of the eighth century (Moretti Sgubini 2008: 172). As seen at other sites, the growth of the settlement is most visible by the expansion of its necropoleis on high grounds adjacent to the main plateau (Riva 2010: 27–28, for a detailed overview).

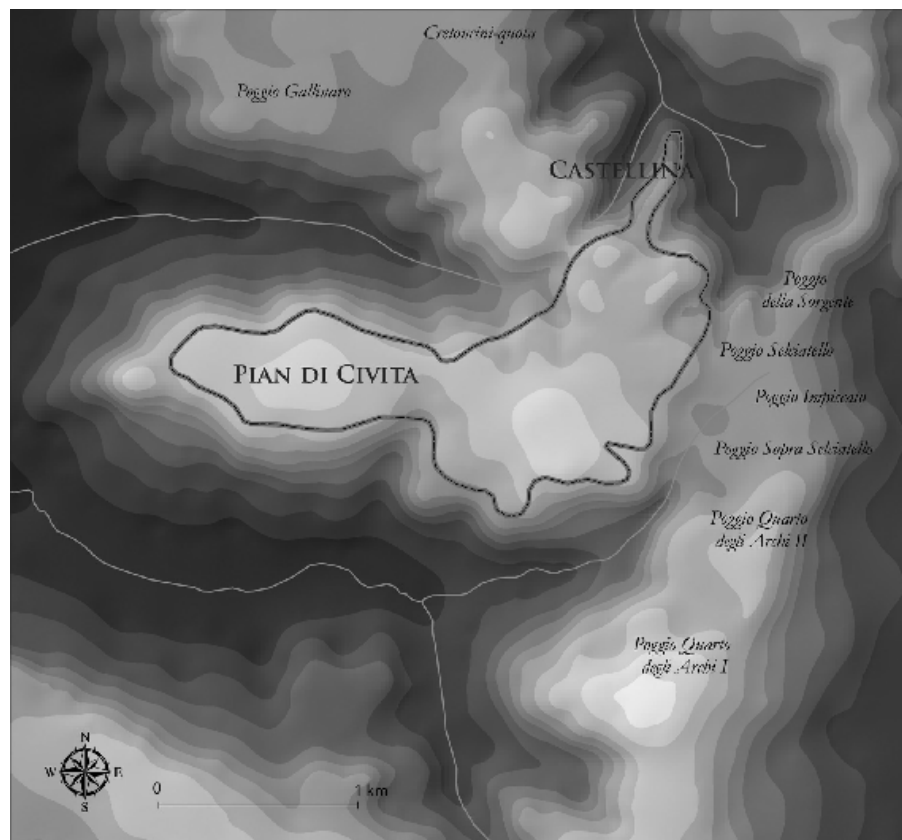


Figure 7.2 Plan of Tarquinia.

Drawing: Riva 2010: fig. 2.

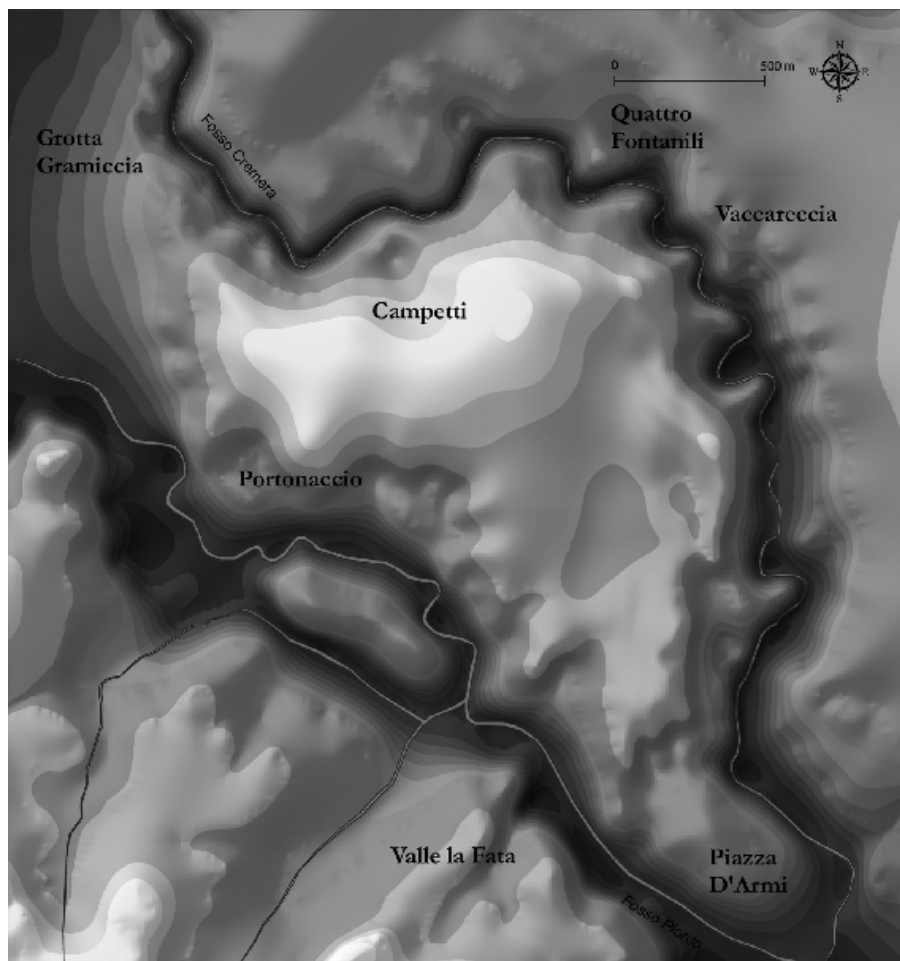


Figure 7.3 Map of Veii.

Drawing: Riva 2010: fig. 4.

Elsewhere in Etruria, urban formation is also seen from the cemeteries with some notably different occupation patterns. Beside Populonia (which developed on a coastal acropolis), some sites, namely Bisenzio and Chiusi, are rather distinctive. Bisenzio developed out of a Final Bronze Age settlement on a promontory overlooking Lake Bolsena (Delpino 1977; Pacciarelli 1991b: 172; 1994: 236–237; 2001: 131) and included a dispersed occupation on lower grounds (Driehaus 1987: fig. 3; Berlingó 2005: 559). Bisenzio is also distinctive for the burial rite of its cemeteries that is unlike that of other contemporary southern Etruscan cemeteries, and for the short duration of its occupation. This ceased at the end of the sixth century for reasons that scholars have linked to the expansion of neighboring Volsinii's territory (Berlingó 2005: 553–564). At Chiusi, the early Iron Age settlement developed into a sizeable center of 130 or 140 hectares in the seventh and sixth centuries, and included the low grounds surrounding the high hill where the urban cults

were located (Pacciarelli 2001: 131–132). However, the formation of a settlement distinct from its *necropoleis* only occurred at the end of the seventh century (Cappuccini 2008: 65 fig. 15). Other urban centers to the north and interior – such as Vetulonia, Volterra and Volsinii – were all located on naturally defended high grounds overlooking fertile plains.

Despite the range of occupation patterns, there are two fundamental aspects that characterize Etruscan towns: firstly, the expansion of their cemeteries indicating demographic growth as well as the growing social differentiation that was materialized in burial ritual; in some cases, as at Tarquinia (Iaia 1999: 13–71) and Populonia (Bartoloni 2002), these changes are visible in the early Iron Age. Again, there is a significant range of variation from site to site in the timing and ways in which social differentiation was manifested in burial ritual. This partly depends upon the differing quantity and quality of published data available, and partly with unquestionable differences in ritual practices as identified at Chiusi (Tuck 2012: 54). However, the shift from horizontal to vertical social differentiation is common to virtually all early urban centers. Analyses of tomb-groups at different sites (e.g., Iaia 1999) have, in fact, demonstrated a shift between the organization of cemeteries according to family groups to one in which social differentiation, expressed in burial ritual, is structured and complex (Riva 2010: 29–38).

The second aspect shared by all Etruscan urban settlements is their location in a resource-rich landscape, regardless of their particular setting, either on the coast or in the interior, on high grounds or lower hills. Maximizing accessibility to resources, whether mineral, agricultural or maritime, was key to urbanization, as was accessibility to other settlements and the wider world (Riva 2010: 22). This is common to other forms of urbanization across the Mediterranean: as Osborne (2005: 12–13) has argued for Greek urbanization, this accessibility allowed urban communities to exploit resources and communication for economic and political ends. The exchange network that this engendered also affected non-urban settlements across central Italy (Riva 2010: 179–188).

4. Urban Beginnings and Ritual Foundations

An emphasis on urban networks in Etruria parallels recent studies on Mediterranean urbanization and colonization that have been influenced by network thinking and the post-colonial turn taking place in historical and social sciences over the last decade (e.g., Cunliffe and Osborne 2005; Malkin 2011; cf. Fulminante and Stoddart 2010). Within Etruscology, on the other hand, this last decade has seen a significant trend towards relating urban beginnings to ritual acts of foundation identified in newly excavated data. Two concurrent developments may be responsible for this: firstly,

Etruscologists have been increasingly interested in the early Iron Age which had been largely the proto-historian's field of expertise. Testimony to this is the heavy investment into the excavation of Tarquinia (Bonghi Jovino and Chiaramonte-Treré 1997; Chiaramonte-Treré 1999; Bonghi Jovino 2001a). Continuing excavations there and elsewhere have produced striking new results, upon which only nowadays we are able to reflect (Sgubini Moretti 2005). The second development is the equally impressive results from Carandini's excavations in Rome (Carafa 2000 for a brief overview), where foundation rituals have been identified in foundation pits near Iron Age huts on the Cermalus hill (Brocato 1997) and underneath a wooden entrance of the first fortification walls of the Palatine (Carandini 1997: 503; Brocato 2000). In interpreting Rome's urbanization from these results, Carandini has upheld Romulus's foundation rites, known from later Roman sources, as historically truthful. According to him, these rites sealed Rome's proto-urban phase in the second half of the eighth century (Carandini 1997: 251–257, 491–520; Carandini 2011 for an overview). All this has stimulated a growing dialogue between early Rome archaeologists and Etruscologists in the study of foundation rituals, and has prompted the latter to use Roman ancient sources to interpret Etruscan evidence. I shall turn to this evidence in order to understand these rituals by concentrating on two key south Etruscan sites, Veii and Tarquinia.

Veii

Veii is a typical southern Etruscan center that developed on a large plateau with its cemeteries located on adjacent terraces (see [Figure 7.3](#)). Like other sites in the region, there is evidence of occupation on nearby terraces at the end of the Bronze Age (Pacciarelli 2001: 159). The key early Iron Age evidence comes from Piazza d'Armi, the southern offshoot of the main plateau. Here, excavation of the western sector revealed a male adult inhumation trench surrounded by small post-holes (Bartoloni 2002–2003; 2006; 2007–2008). The grave, radio-carbon dated to 940–810 BCE, had no grave-goods except for a bronze fibula and an *impasto* fragment, and was unusual for its orientation and ritual at a time when cremation was the norm. Northwest of the burial was a small pit containing burnt animal remains, and also encircled by post-holes. According to the excavator, the post-holes indicate an elliptical hut structure covering the burial and pit, with a northwest entrance overlooking the main plateau. This structure and other coeval huts found in earlier excavations are probably the earliest settlement on Piazza d'Armi that was ritually marked by the exceptional burial, which, according to Bartoloni (2007–2008: 828–829), held the body of an eminent personage. In the second half of the eighth century, a wooden rectangular building replaced the earlier hut, indicating the need to preserve the original site

(Bartoloni 2007–2008: 823). More recently, another inhumation burial, dated to the end of the ninth century at the latest, was found inside an early Iron Age hut associated with a pottery kiln not far from the North-West gate. This burial contained an adult female inhumation, a bronze fibula and a ring, and was protected from the Archaic city walls (Boitani, Biagi and Neri 2008). The investigation of the layout of two roads has linked the position of the male inhumation to the road system that was put in place in the middle of the seventh century, indicating a first regular division of space that consisted of orthogonal boundaries tracing regular plots (Bartoloni, Acconcia and Kortenaar 2005). That this was the heart of the settlement and probably the residence of elite groups is also gauged from previous archaeological finds (Bartoloni 2003: 17–19; Bartoloni et al. 2005: 77).

The 2002 excavations of this area of Piazza d'Armi also uncovered two parallel furrows at the edges of the secondary road, which are earlier than the ashlar masonry blocks used to organize the urban space. The northeast end of the furrows was marked by two pits dug at the intersection with the crossing road; these pits were associated with the deposition of a red *impasto olla* containing fragments of a dark *impasto* chalice (Bartoloni et al. 2005: 81). Bartoloni (2003: 16; Bartoloni et al. 2005: 75) has interpreted these remains as evidence of the *sulcus primigenius*: this is part of Romulus's foundation of Rome, attributed to the foundation of Etruscan cities by Roman later sources, and now linked to the eighth-century finds in Rome itself (Carandini 2006: 150–156; cf. Mastrocinque 2000: 55–56). In order to assess the validity of these claim, let us reflect carefully upon these sources.

According to Varro (*On the Latin Language* 5.143) and Plutarch (*Romulus* 1.11), the Romans considered their foundation rites to be Etruscan in origin. Etruscan teachings concerning these rites were contained in the *libri rituales* (Festus 285) and the *libri tagetici* (cf. Colonna 2004: 305). The *libri tagetici* recorded the teachings of Tages, a prophetic child figure, which was born from the ploughed earth at Tarquinia, according to Cicero (*On Divination* 2.50–51.23). A much later source, Johannes Lydus (*On Celestial Signs* 2.6.B), writing in the sixth century CE, also related the myth to Tarquinia, claiming that the man who ploughed Tages into being was Tarchon, the city's founder. Lydus also claims that Tages imparted his teachings to Tarchon and these were then recorded in writing. Dominique Briquel (1997: 115–18, 148 n. 1) has argued that this emphasis on received scriptures disclose an intent, by these later sources, to establish a deliberate parallel with early Christianity that was also based on revealed and recorded prophecy. While Briquel's suggestion may be correct, it is significant that a single source only, Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (5.19.13), dated to the late fourth/early fifth century CE, relates the *libri tagetici* to the ritual foundation of cities. Most other sources, notably Cicero (*On Divination* 2.50–51.23), claim that Tages's teachings dealt with *haruspicina*, the reading of divine will from observing a

sacrificed animal's entrails, or Etruscan *disciplina* more generally.

Another source of evidence used for investigating the myth of Tages is iconographic and consists of figured representations on a series of third/fourth-century scarabs and an often-cited third-century bronze mirror from Tuscania (Figure 7.4). A closer look at this evidence, however, reveals that the myth has little to do with urban foundations (Briquel 1991: 156–157; cf. de Grummond 2006: 28–32). On the mirror, a youth, named *pava tarchies* by the inscription, is surrounded by an older man, *avl tarchunus*, a god named *Veltune* and other figures; the youth is represented as a *haruspex* in the act of observing an animal liver. On the basis of the inscriptions, Pallottino (1979a) identified the youth with Tages and *avl tarchunus* with Tarchon. While others have rejected and revised this interpretation (van der Meer 1995: 98–100), one may reasonably suggest that the evidence is not sufficient to accept one or the other interpretation. All we can do is recognize, on the mirror, a representation of *etrusca disciplina* in action (de Grummond 2000: 31–32). I will come back to Tages shortly.

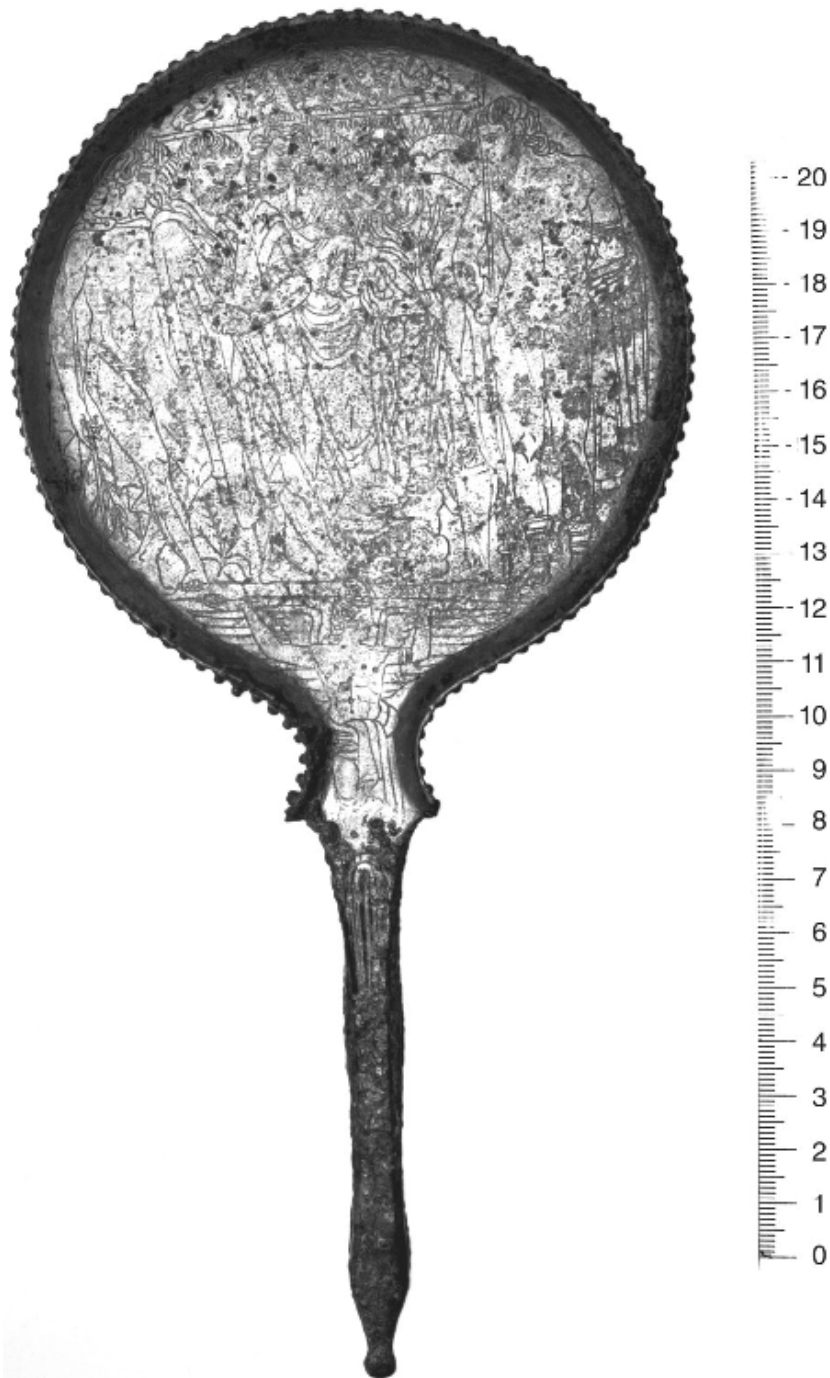


Figure 7.4 Engraved mirror with Pava Tarchies inspecting a liver, early third century BCE. Bronze. From Tuscania. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Inv. 77759.

Photo: Courtesy of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana – Firenze.

Roman foundation rites involved the augurs, who determined the will of the gods through the observation of various natural phenomena and, through the taking of auspices, instructed the city founder where to plough the *sulcus primigenius*. As described in detail by Plutarch in reference to Romulus's founding of Rome (*Romulus* 11.3.5), a second line, formed by the clods removed and placed on the inner side of the *sulcus*, marked the *pomerium* where the walls would be erected (Briquel 2000). No Roman writer claims augury to have Etruscan origins (cf. Carandini 2006: 150), and we cannot establish whether augury in Rome was influenced by Etruscan divination. Nor, unfortunately, can we make any informed assertion on the Etruscan origin of the *sulcus primigenius* or, indeed, on the Etruscan origin of divination in Rome (Scheid 2003: 12). It seems plausible then, as others have noted in regard to early Rome (cf. Smith 2011: 26, 35, 42), not to take Roman ancient sources at face value when they claim the Etruscan origins of Rome's foundation (contra Colonna 2004; Briquel 2000). It is also worth reflecting on the suggestion that the Romans' attribution of particular rites associated with *haruspicina* to the Etruscans had more to do with the way in which the Romans differentiated types of skills and authority in their religion than with any genuine Etruscan origins of these rites (Beard, North and Price 1998: 19–20). Most importantly, Romulus's rites as recounted by the sources may have, in fact, pertained to the foundation of Roman *coloniae*, but were later referred to Rome's foundation (Beard et al. 1998: 329; Mastrocinque 2000: 55). Others have instead argued that Romulus's foundation rite is a conflation of Latin rites, *auspicia* and *auguria*, with Etruscan ones, including the *sulcus primigenius* (Colonna 2004: 305; cf. Carandini 2006: 150). Maintaining circumspection towards the sources does not imply that we have no other evidence for Etruscan foundation rituals; it is nevertheless difficult to sustain that the archaeological evidence of Rome, read through ancient sources, confirms the Etruscan origins of some of its foundation rituals and that, in turn, those very rituals can be identified in the archaeological evidence of sites such as Veii.

Tarquinia

The urban formation of Tarquinia is similar to Veii's (Riva 2010: 23–25), but it was also marked by the building, in the course of the eighth century, of a monumental sacred complex, the Civita complex (Figure 7.5). This complex was preceded in the Late Bronze Age (tenth century BCE in traditional chronology) by votive pits, and a cultic natural cavity in the rock containing offerings that was later respected by the users of the area, and may have been a foundation pit (Bonghi Jovino 2010: 163). Linked to this cavity was a

contemporary hut structure where cultic activities were carried out (Bonghi Jovino 1997: 146–149; 2001b: 73–90; 2001c: 21; see also [Chapter 18](#)). Late Bronze Age occupation has also been identified on the Castellina hill, an offshoot of the main plateau (Mandolesi 1999: 100–112).

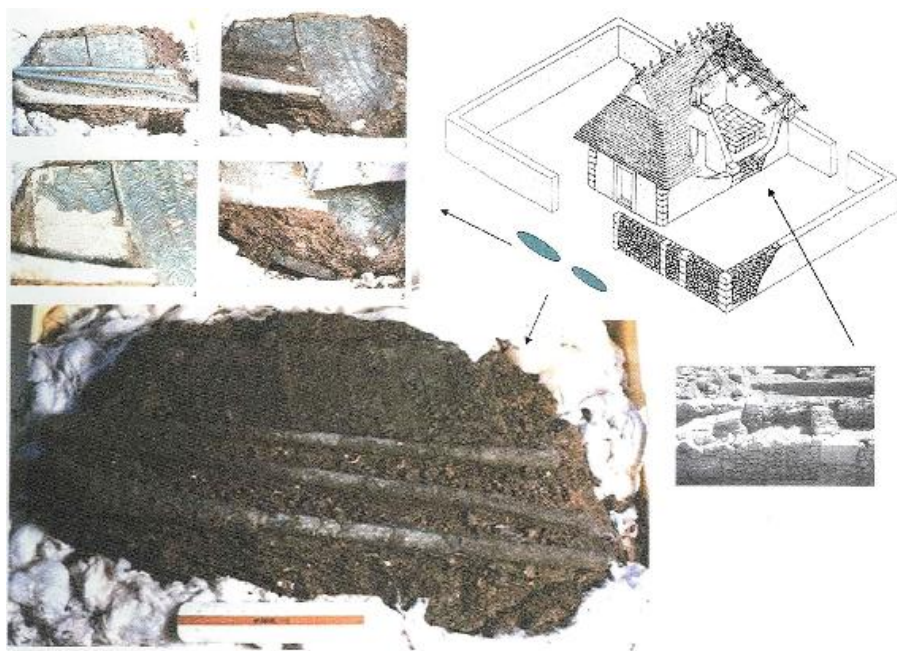


Figure 7.5 Reconstruction of the Civita complex, eighth century BCE, and the discovery of the seventh century BCE deposit of bronze votives. From the Pian di Civita, Tarquinia.

Drawing and Photo: Bagnasco Gianni 2010: fig. 3.

On Civita, a rectangular area near the cavity, known as area alpha, was fenced off and functioned as a theater for various ritual activities, including the inhumation of a brain-damaged and epileptic child between the end of the ninth and the early eighth century. The excavator has interpreted this burial as a highly charged ritual act (Bonghi Jovino 1997: 158–159; 2010: 165). From the middle of the eighth century, stone blocks replaced the fence of the enclosure; stone structures were erected around the cavity, and an altar was probably constructed. Various layers of burning, votive pits and remains of ritual meals and animal offerings document widespread ritual activities (Bonghi Jovino 1997: 160–164). The burial of an adult male, placed in a natural hollow of the rock on the border of the sacred area with no grave goods save for a Euobeian-type jug, has been interpreted an act of human sacrifice (Bonghi Jovino 2001c: 24; 2010: 166). At the end of the eighth century, three infants were also buried in the open air. At the beginning of the seventh century, the area east of the cavity was given a new layout: a stone monumental building, Building beta, consisting of two rooms with a bench-

altar and a small drain, was erected (Bonghi-Jovino 1997: 167–169; 2001c: 25; 2010: 168–171); another infant burial was placed under the north wall of the building during its construction. The east–west orientation of this temple-altar was different from that of area alpha, probably indicating new religious meanings given to the area. Towards the middle of the seventh century, two precinct walls and a terracotta roof were added to Building beta, which thus became the center of the complex (Bonghi Jovino 1997: 179–180; 2001c: 26). A votive deposit of three bronze objects, a *lituus*/trumpet, a shield, and an axe head that had been ritually “killed,” and eating and drinking equipment were placed in two pits at its entrance. Whilst the bronze objects had a ritual and ceremonial function, the vessels, the presence of animal bones, and traces of burning are all evidence of a ritual banquet dating to the construction phase of the building (Bonghi Jovino 1997: 172–175; 2000). Other burials took place in the area down to the sixth century.

5. At the Heart and on the Margins of Settlements

Some scholars (de Grummond 2006: 28), including the site director herself (Bonghi Jovino 2010: 165), have related the burial of the brain-damaged child at Civita to the myth of Tages. De Grummond in particular has linked this burial to the bronze objects, symbols of political power and elite status: Roman sources, she contends, claim that Etruscan kings, the *lucumones*, were responsible for the transmission of Tages’s teachings (de Grummond 2006: 27). As fitting to the archaeology as this argument may be, it is one based on an insufficiency of evidence conflated from late Roman sources, as I have outlined above. My argument therefore is two-fold: firstly, while we need to be extremely cautious of “mapping archaeological finds onto the literary record” (Smith 2011: 38; Torelli 2011: 28–32), the archaeological evidence available today has revealed a picture of ritual activities of such complexity that no Roman source can match it. We do not need Rome, in other words, to imagine how Etruscan urbanism came into being. The evidence from Veii and particularly Tarquinia may be prominent thanks to the long-term efforts put in the excavation of these sites, but we have evidence from elsewhere showing that ritual acts, when studied collectively, are equally notable. Secondly, it is difficult to interpret these rituals as pertaining to urban foundations primarily because, as emphasized before (Smith 2011: 35), the concept of city foundation itself is a slippery one. The religious function of the Civita complex, for example, is evidently undisputable, and some well-documented rites may be convincingly interpreted as foundation rites. But this prompts a key question: what is the foundation about? Did the rites at the Civita mark the foundation of the city or of the complex itself in its various stages of transformation? Evidence of foundation rituals elsewhere elicits similar

questions. At Populonia, a bronze hoard, possibly dated to the eighth century and found at Falda della Guardiola near the Hellenistic city walls, may attest to a foundation ritual marking the town boundaries traced by the later walls (Bartoloni 2004: 247). The hoard, however, must also be interpreted in conjunction with other contemporary or near-contemporary rituals taking place in the settlement. In particular, we now know of what was probably a collective wine-drinking ritual following the intentional abandonment of a rectangular elite hut that took place in the first quarter of the seventh century at the southeast end of Poggio del Telegrafo, documented by the deposit of almost 100 *kyathoi* and a dark *impasto olla* in a pit cut near the post-holes of the hut (Bartoloni and Acconcia 2007). Beside this association, the hoard may also be connected to the contemporary end of an isolated burial ground at Poggio del Telegrafo itself (Cambi and Acconcia 2011: 6).

At Populonia, as at Veii, Tarquinia and elsewhere (cf. Carafa 2007–2008 for an overview), a complex range of ritual acts, each pertaining to precise contexts of use (e.g., an earthwork or wall, a door, a building's destruction, a cult area), took place in the early phases of urbanization and therefore must be understood within that background. However, rather than singling out specific rites as acts of urban foundation, it would be more helpful to consider all of these rites as evidence of newly urbanized communities undergoing rapid social and political change, which could generate conflict and social stress, as Vanzetti (2007–2008) has suggested in his analysis of early Iron Age intramural burials. We should also examine these rites in conjunction with others taking place at the physical boundaries of the city, the cemeteries, where burial practices became increasingly elaborate in the course of the eighth century. While it is important to emphasize the diversity in the range of burial rites and temporal development of each cemetery across Etruria, the increasing complexity and monumentalization of the cemeterial space, the changing tomb structures and grave-goods deposited are characteristics common to many urban cemeteries between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. As I have argued elsewhere (Riva 2010), this evidence indicates an increasing attention to funerary practices, which contributed to the structuring of political relationships taking shape within emerging urban communities. Integrating these practices with the rites that took place at the heart of the settlement helps us to understand better the impact of ritual activities within Etruscan urbanization. Foundation rituals, however, occurred throughout the history of urbanism in Etruria as elsewhere in Italy and other Mediterranean regions (cf. Brocato 2000: 154–158). In Etruria, by the sixth century and later, these rituals were, in fact, highly codified, as attested by the monumental cultic area on the acropolis of Marzabotto in Etruria Padana, which was linked to the town's orthogonal plan. Here, the earliest known structure, the altar/well B, has been interpreted as a *mundus*, an underground space that linked the world of the living with the underground world and its chthonic deities (Vitali 2001: 28–34). Altars similarly devoted to chthonian cults are also

known at other Archaic sanctuaries (cf. list in Colonna 2004: 307).

6. Conclusion

Over the last 30 years, we have come to a clearer understanding of Etruscan urbanization than has ever been possible before: the picture of an early process beginning at the end of the Bronze Age with the stable occupation of hills or vast tablelands that would become the future cities is no longer contested. Scholars have recently focused on the early phases of urbanization and the ritual activities occurring alongside it. By integrating these activities with all ritual practices taking place both at the heart and boundaries of towns, we can begin to shift our focus from foundation acts and events, as recounted by later Roman sources, towards the cumulative impact of the long-term political process underlying urbanism. By that I mean a process at the center of which is the politicization of social relations within growing urban communities, that took place, we can only surmise, not without conflict; the ritual arena was an appropriate space where such conflict was negotiated. How we can read the archaeological record of Etruscan urbanization vis-à-vis Roman sources remains a critical matter, but the recent emphasis on foundation rites seems to be the result of a disproportionate concern with what the texts tell us in order to interpret the archaeology. What the texts tell us, however, has more to do with the foundation of Roman *coloniae* than it has with Etruscan urbanization. The picture afforded by the archaeology, on the other hand, is much richer than what we may reconstruct from literary sources. And it is to the archaeology that we must continue to turn if we are to understand the Etruscans in all of their complexity.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Carandini and Cappelli 2000 offers a picture of the finds and scholarly interpretations of the earliest phases of urbanization in Latium and Etruria. De Grummond 2006 gives a summary of the mythical figures in Etruscan religion, some of which have been linked to the foundation of Etruscan towns. Riva 2010 offers a detailed overview and interpretation of funerary ritual and social change in the urbanizing phase of Etruria. Sgubini Moretti 2005 provides a brilliant picture of some of the latest finds on the urbanism of Southern Etruria. Bonghi Jovino 2010 provides the latest detailed summary of the remarkable finds from the Tarquinia Project and the excavation campaigns on the settlement of Tarquinia by the University of Milan.

NOTES

- 1 The Roman school of Italian proto-history was developed around the studies and teaching of Renato Peroni who instituted the first chair of European proto-history at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’ in 1963 and established a scholarly tradition of studies on the Italian Bronze and Iron Ages that was inspired by Continental European archaeology and the studies of Müller-Karpe.

2 The expression is d'Agostino's (1998).

CHAPTER 8

Poggio Civitate

Community Form in Inland Etruria

Anthony S. Tuck

1. Introduction

The eighth through sixth centuries in central Italy was a time of significant social and political dynamism in Etruria, one which resulted in the rapid formation of urban centers within Etruria and its immediate periphery.¹ Among the various ethnic groups in Italy at this time, the Etruscans were the only indigenous people to participate in this phase of Mediterranean urbanism (see further, [Chapter 7](#)). However, archaeological evidence of the physical form of most Etruscan cities is not abundant. Areas well-suited for defense and with access to sufficient water sources remained good places for habitation well past the Etruscan period (e.g., Volterra's Etruscan gate remains an entry point into the city even today). As a result, many modern Italian communities throughout central Italy are situated directly over their ancient counterparts, thus rendering them archaeologically inaccessible. However, exceptions exist, and one important example is the site of Poggio Civitate in the central, inland region of modern-day Tuscany, which has been the focus of continuous archaeological excavation since 1966. Communities governed by powerful aristocratic families interested in using the region's vast mineral wealth formed around centers like Poggio Civitate, allowing us to understand better a specific type of urban system that functioned as a hallmark of social and political organization in Etruria's inland.

A hilltop settlement situated 25 kilometers south of modern Siena, Poggio Civitate flourished from the eighth through the sixth centuries. The hill dominates the northern reaches of the Ombrone Valley and sits at the edge of the Colline Metallifere, Tuscany's "Metal Bearing Hills," placing it near abundant agricultural resources as well as mineral wealth (e.g., sources of copper, iron, silver, and tin). Its destruction and abandonment in the middle years of the sixth century resulted in a nearly pristine archaeological environment, one which preserves some of the region's best evidence for the development of inland urban communities. Data collected over several decades of excavation at Poggio Civitate have revealed two major phases of occupation. Moreover, because it was never re-inhabited, the site stands as one of the very few in central Italy that allows archaeologists, linguists, and

art historians to document, analyze and interpret the nuances and facets of Etruscan everyday life at a settlement occupied over a relatively long span.

2. Poggio Civitate during the Orientalizing Period (c.675–650 – c.600)

Poggio Civitate and its western spur of Poggio Aguzzo sit atop a hill of approximately 1.8 square kilometers. A broad plateau, locally known as Piano del Tesoro (the Plateau of the Treasure), dominates the hill's western extent. Most of the site's architectural development was centered on this plateau, and evidence of human occupation stretches back to the Iron Age (c.1000–c.700).

At around the middle of the seventh century, the inhabitants of Poggio Civitate began a building program of considerable scale and ambition. Three structures ([Figure 8.1](#)) dating to this period stood by the end of the century, each reflecting different facets of the social, economic, and political interests of the aristocratic family that lived there. The complex of buildings included an opulent residence, a building that appears to have served as a temple, and an industrial building of considerable size and length (Nielsen and Tuck 2001).



Figure 8.1 Digital reconstruction of the three Orientalizing (mid-seventh century BCE) structures at Poggio Civitate by Evander Batson.

Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

The residence, known in the literature as Orientalizing Complex Building 1/ Residence (OC1/Residence), occupied the western side of Piano del Tesoro. It

represents a rarely preserved example of the type of house we might expect of an Etruscan aristocrat of the period, exemplified elsewhere in the archaeological record by lavish tombs such as the Regolini-Galassi at Caere (see further, Pareti 1947) or the *Tomba del Duce* at Vetulonia (see further, Camporeale 1967). The building's form was long and rectangular, and its dimensions (36.2×8.4 – 8.6 meters) set it apart from the relatively modest scale of curvilinear huts typical of the preceding century (Colantoni 2012; see also [Chapter 10](#)) as well as recently discovered non-elite domestic architecture with which it was contemporary at Poggio Civitate (Tuck, Huntsman and Kriendler 2013).

OC1/Residence also employed the novel technology of a tiled, terracotta roof. Evidence for roofing materials at the site prior to the construction of this complex suggests builders employed traditional thatch (Carroll, Rodriguez and Tuck 2011). The movement to terracotta tiles would have required a significant degree of social organization to collect, process, form, and fire the large amount of clay needed for such tiles, a process hinted at by a number of administrative markings placed on tiles before they were fired (Tuck and Wallace 2013). But to the site's elite population, the effort was clearly worth the investment, allowing designers to attenuate significantly and monumentalize domestic architecture during this period. The building was also adorned with a system of terracotta decoration, with "cut-out" style acroterial sculptures adhered directly onto the crowning ridgepole tiles of the roof. The iconographic program of the decoration reflected the social and political values of Poggio Civitate's aristocrats and included images related to elite behaviors such as hunting (Rystedt 1984) as well as images of fertility divinities with whom the site's elite sought to associate themselves (Tuck 2006).

Inside, the building's occupants enjoyed a life of considerable luxury. Facets of everyday life are reflected in the massive storage vessels, including large countersunk *pithoi* filled with grain, and cooking equipment recovered in the northern end of the building. The great number of objects found throughout OC1/Residence suggests that the structure did not function as a common household. Rather, its residents mixed their wine in huge bronze cauldrons and ate their meals on elegant ceramics, both locally produced and imported from Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. Their tables, chairs and furniture were inlaid with carefully wrought decorations in antler, bone, ivory, and stone. Jewelry in gold, silver, and bronze found on the structure's floor as well as objects of everyday use (e.g., weapons, cosmetic implements, and fishing equipment) also speak to a domestic life of wealth and status enjoyed by the building's occupants.

Adjacent to the OC1/Residence was another building of considerable size. This rectangular, 23.25×9.2 meter structure, called Orientalizing Complex Building 3/Tripartite (OC3/Tripartite), remains one of the more enigmatic

buildings of the plateau's early complex. Unlike OC1/Residence, it employed clear interior divisions that created a central room precisely twice the area of the two flanking chambers. This tripartite division of space is curiously similar to later Etruscan religious architecture (e.g., Tarquinia's *Ara della Regina* temple; see Bagnasco Gianni 2011), suggesting that OC3/Tripartite was an early form of temple. This possibility is further enhanced by the discovery of a series of circular pits cut into bedrock immediately south of OC3/Tripartite's southern foundation wall. Extremely high concentrations of organic material found in these pits suggest that they served some votive capacity associated with the building. Moreover, evidence recovered from the floor of OC3/Tripartite is unlike the materials found in OC1/Residence. Not only is evidence of domesticity – storage vessels and cooking wares – notable for its absence, but those ceramics that were recovered are unusual. They largely consist of refined, sometimes inscribed, bucchero vessels manufactured at other centers of the Etruscan world (e.g., Caere and possibly Populonia) (see further, [Chapter 15](#)). Moreover, the *muluvanice*-inscriptions on two of these vessels represent a type that Wallace (2008) has linked to the aristocratic gift-giving that was characteristic of this period. Their presence in a building such as OC3/Tripartite may reflect one of the ways in which the elites of the Orientalizing period used religious customs to coordinate and control material communication.

Orientalizing Complex Building 2/Workshop (OC2/Workshop) stood a short distance away from the other two structures of the complex. Positioned at the extreme southeast edge of Piano del Tesoro, the building stretched a remarkable 52 meters in length. Like OC1/Residence and OC3/Tripartite, this monumental structure also employed a tiled, terracotta roof with an impressive decorative scheme. Sculpted acroteria in the form of lotus palmette flowers crowned its apex and a surprisingly advanced gutter system (the *lateral sima*) consisted of a series of waterspouts in the shape of feline heads punctuated by terminal cover tiles in the form of human female heads. This type of image – a female flanked by felines – is an important example of an iconography of a divinity adapted from Near Eastern sources during the socially dynamic Orientalizing period and is found on a large number of different types of artifacts associated with elite behavior and consumption throughout Etruria at this time (Damgaard Andersen 1992). The Poggio Civitate version of this “Mistress of Animals” (*potnia theron* in Greek) corresponds to Etruscan interpretations of this eastern fertility divinity, one likely known in their culture as Uni, the Etruscan predecessor to the Roman Juno (Tuck 2006; see also [Chapter 23](#)).

At first glance, it may seem surprising that a building as elaborately decorated as OC2/Workshop should be dedicated to the seemingly mundane activities of industry and manufacturing. However, the range and types of materials produced there suggest that production occurred under the control of Poggio

Civitate's elite family and probably largely for its benefit.

Elements of bellows, terracotta piping, crucibles, and small ovens recovered in the eastern extent of the building all point to a tradition of metal production housed within (Nielsen 1993). In the same area, excavators recovered thousands of fragments of worked and partially worked elements of animal bone and antler, many of which were being fashioned into inlays similar to those found in OC1/Residence (Nielsen 1995). Elsewhere in the structure, archaeologists found evidence of pottery production, the spinning and weaving of wool, the butchering of animals, the processing of grains, and a number of other similar activities. In fact, the day the building was destroyed by fire, workers had produced a series of clay roofing tiles that were placed in the center of the floor to dry in the shade of the roof. When the fire broke out, people panicked and ran from the building, stepping on the still wet clay and thus preserving their footprints (Nielsen 1987).

The materials manufactured in OC2/Workshop are notable not only for the wide range of types, but also for the distinctive forms many of them take. It is all the more curious, considering how large this workshop was, that almost nothing manufactured in OC2/Workshop has ever been found anywhere outside of Poggio Civitate or its associated cemetery, Poggio Aguzzo (Tuck 2009). Instead, it seems that nearly all of the goods and materials produced there were used locally. The many types of high-status items manufactured – e.g., bronzes, inlaid furniture, and high-quality cloth (see further, [Chapter 16](#)), even something as seemingly utilitarian as elements of a terracotta roof – are all suggestive of wealth and status. They probably indicate that the site's social elite controlled the manufacturing processes, and, as has already been remarked, that most of the materials produced were for their benefit and consumption.

Given this situation, the representation of a divinity associated with fertility on the roofs of all three structures was a logical one for Poggio Civitate's elite family to display and promote. Aristocratically organized communities like Poggio Civitate often emphasize such divinities since family lineage and procreation are crucial instruments of sociopolitical control. Throughout Etruscan and later Roman political iconography, examples proliferate with both subtle and explicit references to the idea of elite familial descent from the union of a mortal man and a fertility divinity (see Tuck 2010). The fact that all three buildings employed this iconographic scheme suggests that their construction and function occurred under the direction and for the benefit of an aristocratic family interested in making reference to such a claim (Tuck 2006).

This complex of interrelated structures did not stand in isolation on Poggio Civitate. Recent excavation at the site has revealed the presence of a number of non-elite houses, located immediately to the southwest of the plateau upon which the elite complex stood (Tuck et al. 2013). These modest domiciles,

possibly the housing for workers associated with OC2/Workshop, suggest a relative degree of material affluence, although a fuller appreciation of both the extent and complexity of Poggio Civitate's subordinate community awaits future excavation at the site.

3. Poggio Civitate in the Archaic Period (c.600–550/530)

Following the destruction of Poggio Civitate's Orientalizing period complex, the Piano del Tesoro plateau was leveled and prepared for the construction of a building of truly impressive scale (Figure 8.2, Plate Section). It took the form of a four-winged structure with each wing stretching approximately 60 meters in length. The interior employed a colonnade on three sides of the courtyard, framing a small, enigmatic square enclosure on the building's western side. A defensive wall projecting south of the structure's western face added an additional 30 meters to the building's façade along this side, creating a southern courtyard and thus protecting access to water via the well located in this area. The building's size and high position on the hill are both remarkable in their own right, while the defensive moat to the north and its watchtowers suggest a concern with defense.



Figure 8.2 Digital reconstruction of the Archaic period (first half of the sixth century BCE) building at Poggio Civitate by Evander Batson.

Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

The exceptional size and ornate decorative program of Poggio Civitate's Archaic period phase building is not entirely without parallel in the Etruscan world. Although somewhat smaller in overall size, excavation at Zone F of Acquarossa preserves evidence of a roughly contemporary monumental complex of similar architectural sensibility (Wikander 1985). Like Poggio Civitate, the Acquarossa structures employed a terracotta decorative system

representing similar themes of aristocratic identity and privilege, and are organized around a defined courtyard area (Meyers 2012). This indicates that the designers and builders of Poggio Civitate knew of and applied architectural innovations shared by other emergent, aristocratically organized communities of this period.

Over the many years of excavation and research at Poggio Civitate, a number of theories as to the function and use of this building have been posited. One suggestion offered by the site's first excavator, Kyle Phillips, held that the building served as a form of meeting hall, where delegates from far-flung communities could meet to engage in political and religious events (Phillips 1993). Other scholars have proposed that the building functioned as a *palazzo*, serving the domestic needs of the local aristocracy (Cristofani 1975). Still others have found parallels in the public spaces of the Greek world and posited the building served as a marketplace for commercial enterprise (de Grummond 1997; Turfa and Steinmeyer 2002). While each suggestion has its merits, a broader consideration of the building and its place in the surrounding landscape may indicate that this unusual and impressive structure could have and perhaps did serve all of these functions and potentially others as well (see further, Edlund-Berry 2012).

Like the earlier complex, this massive building was opulently decorated, with a terracotta sculptural program that was even more ambitious than the one that enhanced the site's Orientalizing structures. Atop the apex of the roof, artisans attached life-size statues of enthroned human figures, several wearing broad brimmed, peaked, sombrero-like hats – hats that encouraged some observers informally to describe them as “Cowboy” statues (Edlund 1992; O'Donoghue 2013). The seated figures, both male (Figure 8.3) and female, appear originally to have held attributes of some form that may have helped identify them to the ancient viewer, although those emblems are now lost. Even so, most modern scholars have argued that these figures most likely represented individuals associated with the ruling family of Poggio Civitate, perhaps their deified ancestors (see further, O'Donoghue 2013), another theme that finds wide expression not only in Etruria but also in the later Italic political world (Camporeale 2009). Other human figures, both standing and running, were also placed on the roof's apex along with a number of animals and fantastic creatures. Winged sphinxes were joined on the roof's pitch by griffins, lions, wild boar, horses, and hippocampi. Unfortunately, we cannot know with certainty where particular figures were placed, although it is inviting to imagine an assortment of humans flanked by animals, akin to the notion of the *potnia theron*, an organization underscoring the politically popular and effective suggestion of a semi-divinized status for the site's ruling elite.

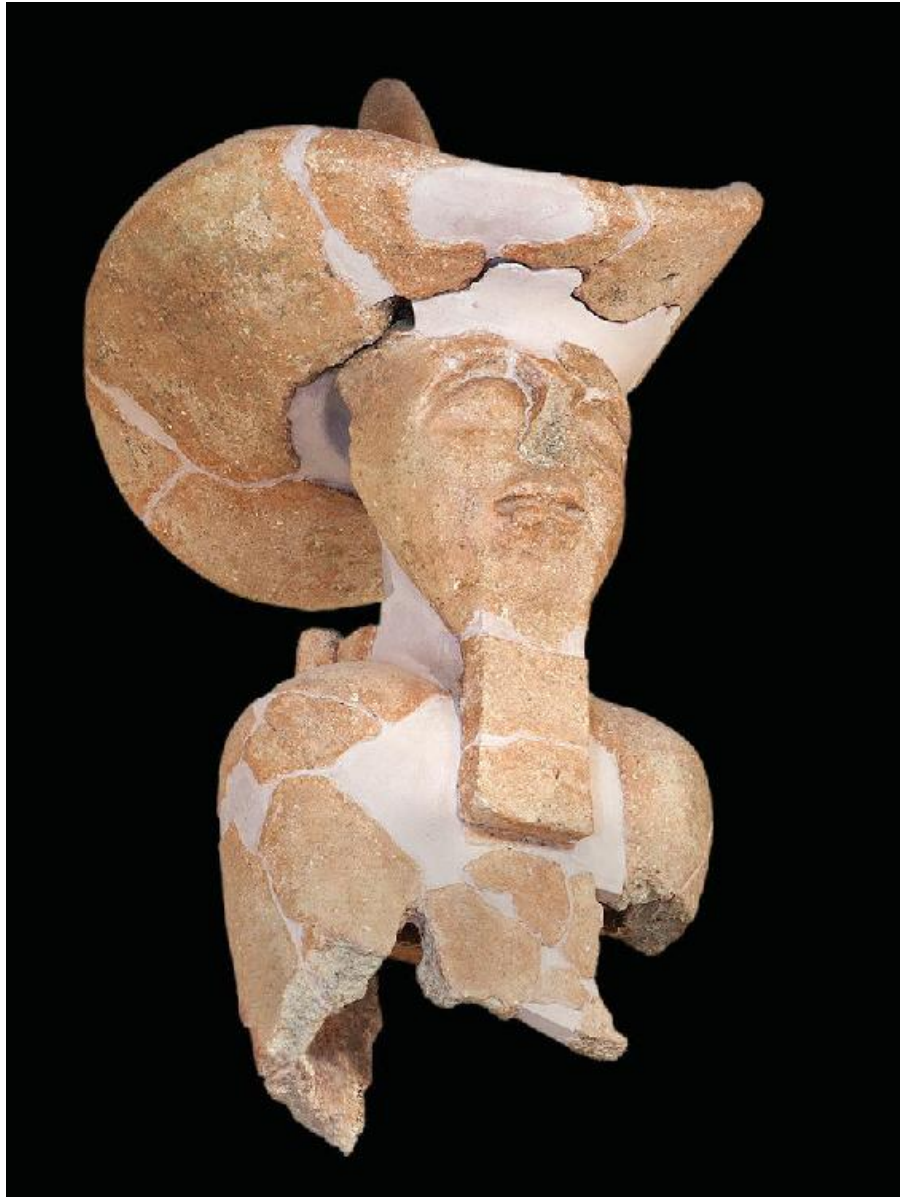


Figure 8.3 Seated Male Acroterium, first half of the sixth century BCE. Terracotta. From the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate. Antiquarium di Poggio Civitate, Inv. 111198.

Photo: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

This monumental building was also ornamented with a sculpted *lateral sima* similar to those employed in the Orientalizing structures. Feline waterspouts alternating with applied female heads and floral rosettes lined the courtyard's interior – another use of the widely popular *potnia theron* motif (Damgaard Andersen 1990). The exterior of the structure does not appear to have had a

simā system, but it did make use of terminal antefixes in the form of gorgons (Neils 1976). In addition, the roof's exposed wooden beams were protected and decorated with applied frieze plaques. A total of four types have been found: a horse-race (Root 1973), a banquet (Small 1971) (see [Figure 23.3](#)), a procession with a pair of individuals riding in a chariot led by attendants (Gantz 1974), and a scene of seated and standing figures holding various religious and political attributes (Gantz 1971). The latter figures may echo, in relief, the ones that adorned the building's roof. While the roofs of buildings at Poggio Civitate are uncommonly well preserved, finds from many other sites throughout Etruria suggest that the iconographic program represented here, with themes of both elite prerogative and august ancestry, was one frequently employed throughout central Italy during this period (Winter 2009).

Unlike the buildings that were part of the plateau's Orientalizing complex where the high concentration of small finds allows for a detailed reconstruction of each of its structures' functions, this particular building appears largely to have been emptied of its contents prior to its demolition. Some simple ceramics were recovered from the floor along its southern flank, potentially suggesting this area was employed as a food preparation area, but otherwise we can say little of the various functions of this multi-roomed building.

Even more puzzling is the manner in which Poggio Civitate was abandoned during the middle of the sixth century. The distribution of the various sculptural elements of the building suggests that its statues and terracotta adornments were dismantled; most were then smashed and the various fragments separated before being buried in pits located to the north and west of Piano del Tesoro. To date, approximately 30 percent of the building's decorative system has been recovered (an archaeologically enormous amount), but considerably more remains to be discovered.

Precisely why this massive, highly visible, and opulent structure would have been abandoned in this way remains unclear, although several scholars have noted that the demolition and abandonment of Poggio Civitate bears a striking resemblance to much later examples of a Roman political and military practice, the *damnatio memoriae* or the "damnation of memory" (Edlund 1994). To understand the nature of such a practice, one must appreciate the importance of identity and memory within the ancient Italic political arena. The preservation and presentation of one's family ancestry was a central component of aristocratic Etruscan and Roman households (Flower 2000). Ancestral masks of any family of importance were kept on visible display within the typical Republican house, serving both as a reminder to the living inhabitants of the house of where their authority and prestige came from as well as a display to visitors of that very lineage. At times, these masks were worn by individuals at public events (e.g., see Polybius 6.53; Suetonius

Vespasian 19.2), creating a performance of ancestry whereby the deceased members of an elite family, complete with all the awards, honors, and emblems of office those ancestors once achieved, were made present once again. For a living member of such a family, a guiding ambition was to live a life that strove to excel these past achievements and be remembered as adding to the prestige of one's ancestors. Thus, the Roman aristocrat lived on, through and in the memory of his/her descendants. To erase such a memory – to dismantle a building that was, in part, designed to communicate such a theme – was not only to destroy a site in the present, but to end the political utility of that familial ancestry for future generations. Thus the systematic obliteration of Poggio Civitate's Archaic period phase may have been an example of such a practice, as powerful Etruscan city states such as Populonia, Chiusi, or Arezzo began to consolidate political control over broader territories.

If the human figures that adorned the roof of Poggio Civitate's sixth century monumental building represented the ancestors of the family that governed the site, then its demolition and the site's subsequent abandonment may have been motivated by a similar desire to obliterate the visual statement of authority that the building represented. But such a hypothesis assumes that the building, during its lifetime, was seen and understood as an expression of such power. If so, who might the audience for its iconography have been?

Poggio Civitate is surrounded by a series of smaller hills to the north and west (Figure 8.4), several of which preserve evidence of ancient occupation. In the nearby town of Vescovado di Murlo, construction during the 1950s revealed the presence of a pair of chamber tombs containing material dating from the sixth through the fourth centuries. Elsewhere in Vescovado di Murlo, construction of a road revealed a complex chambered furnace. Later, controlled excavation in the immediate vicinity of this industrial space revealed an associated domestic space and produced materials demonstrating that the furnace and household were dated to the fifth to third centuries. Beneath the floor of the domicile, heavy concentrations of pottery dating to the sixth century were found (Tuck et al. 2009). Chance discovery of fourth or third century burials on the hill of Pompana as well as sporadic discoveries of sixth and seventh century ceramics at Montepescini, San Guisto, and Lupompesi further point to the occupation of these hills at a time both during and following the settlement of Poggio Civitate (Campana 2001).

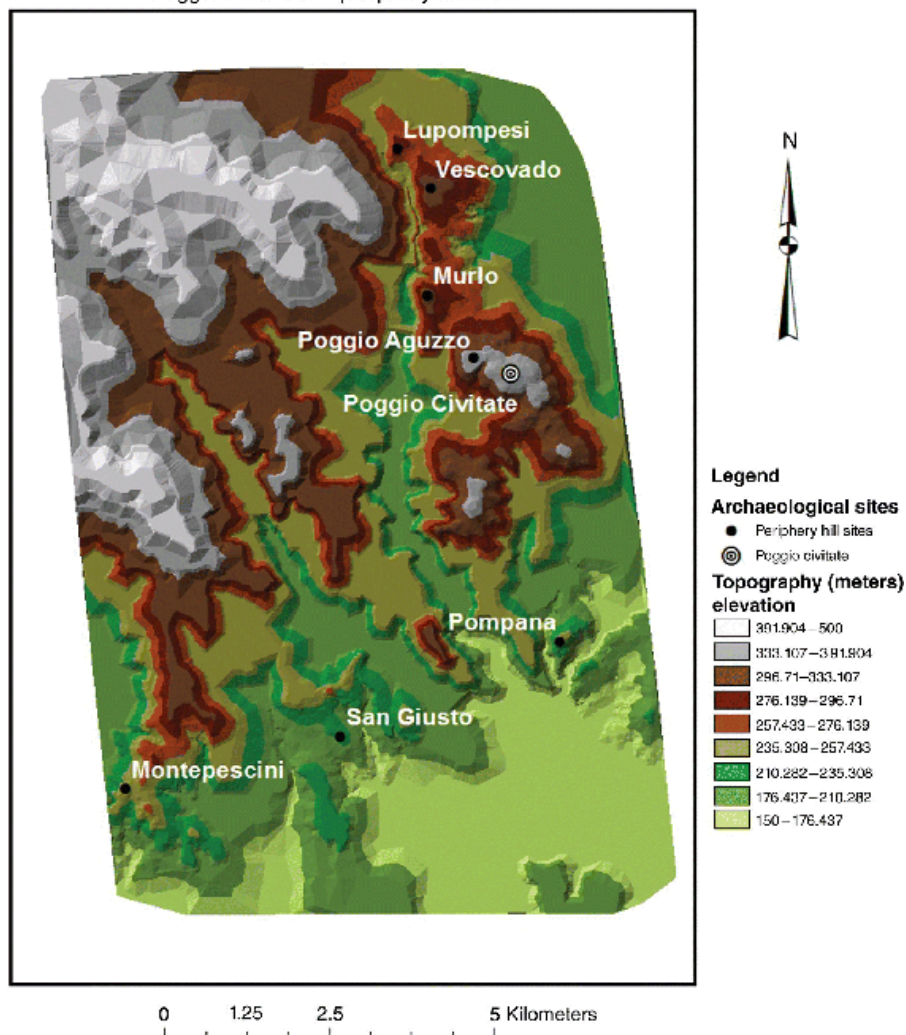


Figure 8.4 Topographic map of Poggio Civitate (PC) and its surrounding communities by Taylor Oshan.

Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

While excavation continues at Poggio Civitate and its surrounding territory, the current state of evidence allows for some reasoned conjecture. From atop Poggio Civitate, the monumental building that dominated Piano del Tesoro during the sixth century would have been visible from a considerable distance. Similarly, the extremely large scale of the structure, with its interior courtyard, could easily have held gatherings of substantial numbers of people, far more than the current state of evidence from Poggio Civitate itself suggests lived on the hill. Considering this, it is probable that its ornate sculptural program communicated the power and status of the site's ruling family to the surrounding countryside. Similarly, it is not difficult to imagine

seasonal festivals and social events such as weddings and birth celebrations, or even more mundane activities such as exchange and trade, that would have necessitated the gathering of the populations from these peripheral communities.

Unfortunately, the fact that most contemporary Etruscan settlements remain archaeologically invisible makes certainty on this point impossible. The state of our evidence does not tell us whether or not the massive Archaic structure at Poggio Civitate was unusual or one of many such architectural expressions of social and political power in central Italy. As noted above, only the site of Acquarossa preserves comparable domestic architecture, although new discoveries are possible with every new season of excavation. However, a model for the kind of community organization described above not only exists but also represents the political system used in the region around the site today. Since the Medieval period, rural communities like Murlo, a hilltop village adjacent to Poggio Civitate, have been organized into a *comune* system, a form of governance whereby central, larger communities served as the political and administrative center for a series of associated, smaller, physically separated hamlets and villages. Much as Poggio Civitate may have done centuries before, the town common of Murlo frequently hosts events and festivals attended by the entire population of the broader *comune*. And, in a manner much as the ornate iconography of Poggio Civitate's structures might once have functioned, the image of the "Cowboy" statue serves today as one of the official emblems that the *comune* of Murlo displays to the wider world.

4. Conclusions

Poggio Civitate was a community that flourished from the late stages of the Iron Age through the middle of the Archaic period. As excavations continue to reveal new facets of ancient life at the site, the evidence to date confirms that the aristocratic center of the community was situated atop Piano del Tesoro. With magnificently large, opulently decorated buildings and the ability to convert raw materials into usable goods, aristocrats at the site governed communities living both on the immediate periphery of Piano del Tesoro as well as populations occupying villages atop nearby hills. Unlike the urban development atop the broad coastal plateaus of Tarquinia or Caere, the inland region of Tuscany's iconic, undulating terrain coupled with an Etruscan desire to occupy only the highest, defensible areas would have required that politically and socially connected communities remain physically separated by their topography (Tuck 2012). Nevertheless, the evidence from Poggio Civitate suggests the site's ruling elite and the

craftspeople in their employ were well versed in the innovative technologies and ideologies in this early stage of the Etruscan urban experiment.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

In spite of nearly fifty years of continuous excavation at Poggio Civitate, the site continues to reveal new discoveries. All of the excavation’s archival data – the foundation upon which all interpretation must rest – are available through the program’s public database, located at <http://www.poggiocivitate.org/>. Excavators add new information to this system every year and researchers are free to download images, peruse excavation logs and reports, and even provide commentary on information housed there. This enormous archive of excavation data has been used by many scholars over the years for studies concerned with a number of different facets of life at the site. Berkin 2003 considers the large quantity of distinctive bucchero pottery recovered from within OC1/Residence, offering fascinating insight

into the communal banqueting that likely occurred in this domestic space. Edlund 1992 studies the remarkable human sculpture of the Archaic period roofing system, providing important analysis concerning the manner in which these curious images were made and how they were understood by the ancient population of the site. Rystedt's work (1983 and 1984) focuses on the sculpture of Poggio Civitate's Orientalizing period complex and compares its iconography to similar decorative architectural systems from Acquarossa. Warden's 1985 study of metal artifacts recovered across the site provides one of the very few chronologically and contextually defined presentations of such objects in the region, giving researchers an important foundation upon which to compare materials recovered from sites without such well-preserved architecture. In all, research continues at Poggio Civitate as students and scholars commit to new projects that further our understanding of numerous facets of life the site.

NOTE

¹ All dates are BCE.

CHAPTER 9

Southern and Inner Etruria

Benchmark Sites and Current Excavations

Claudio Bizzarri

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a brief historical sketch and update on the current state of excavations in southern Etruria. This was one of the regions crucial to the earliest phases of the development of Etruscan civilization as well as highly important for its relationship to inner Etruria, to which it was connected by waterways (especially the Tiber), and for its contacts with other Mediterranean cultures. This chapter treats southern Etruria by surveying its most important sites: Orvieto, Tarquinia (Gravisca, Bisenzio, Musarna), Cerveteri (Pyrgi), Vulci, Veii, and Sovana.

2. Orvieto/Volsinii/Velzna

The year 2000 marked the beginning of an archaeological dig in the area of the Campo della Fiera ([Figure 9.1](#)), in the valley below the cliff of Orvieto and towards the west. Simonetta Stopponi directed the excavation, first under the auspices of the University of Macerata and then of the University of Perugia. She identified it as the site of the Etruscan federal sanctuary known in antiquity as the *Fanum Voltumnae*. While Livy writes at length about this place (*History of Rome* 6.23, 25, 61; 5.17; 6.2), he provides no geographical indications, taking it for granted that everyone during the Augustan period knew where this important political, religious, and economical place was located. In the nineteenth century, a few interesting architectural terracottas, now in Berlin, as well as the remains of walls and tombs, were found here. Stopponi's excavation has provided a much clearer picture of what must have been one of the most sacred Etruscan sites (see further, the publications in the annals of the Fondazione per il Museo "Claudio Faina," in particular the volumes of 2009 and 2012; also Stopponi 2013).



Figure 9.1 Aerial view of the excavations at Campo della Fiera, Orvieto.

Photo: Courtesy of Simonetta Stopponi, University of Perugia.

The Campo della Fiera was first of all a sanctuary and, as such, its various structures range in date from around the middle of the sixth century BCE to the thirteenth-century Christian church of San Pietro in Vetere. The latter was abandoned around the middle of the fourteenth century when the plague raged throughout Italy and the rest of Europe. The name itself is revealing and indicates the appropriation, by Christians, of an important site of pagan worship and the material superposition of structures.

The *Fanum Voltumnae*, destroyed in 264 BCE during the Roman siege of Velzna (Etruscan Orvieto) by M. Fulvius Flaccus (Torelli 1968), was the place reserved for the annual assemblies of representatives of the various Etruscan cities, and was, therefore, the political fulcrum of the confederation. Hence, extensive spaces were required for the delegations and various activities. The excavation currently underway covers an area of over 30,000 square meters. Two roads paved in volcanic stone have been identified. One led to Bolsena and thus to southern Etruria. The other is 7 meters wide and has been interpreted as a *Via Sacra*, where processions would have taken place. It moves in the direction of the remains of a temple (Temple B), whose ruins lie half way up the hill in a privileged position with regards to the plain below. A second sacred building, Temple A, came to light in a sacred enclosure between the two paved roads. It was used continuously from the sixth century BCE up until Roman times, as indicated by two altars located to its east, and numerous votive deposits.

A clear indication of just how important the cults were is furnished by some of the material found, including imported Attic red- and black-figure pottery, stone bases for small votive bronzes, and, above all, a trachyte base around 84

centimeters high and c.40 centimeters wide for a larger statue with a long inscription that runs along two sides of the base. The inscription, the longest from the Archaic period in Orvieto, provides interesting information on various aspects of the Etruscan civilization, though not necessarily directly connected with Velzna. It reads: *kanuta larecenas laute/nitha aranthia pinies puia turuce thuschval marvethul faliathere*. What makes this text particularly important are some of the words and their interpretation. As translated by Stopponi (2009: 441–449), it reads, “Kanuta, a *liberta* or freedwoman of the Larecena gens, wife of Arnth Pinie, dedicates (this gift) to the Thuschva (female divinities associated with the Dionysian sphere) of the site of the celestial region.” The presence of an expensive votive gift donated by a woman in an Etruscan sanctuary during the sixth century BCE is, by itself, of note (see further, [Chapter 18](#)). Kanuta was, moreover, of an inferior rank (*liberta*), and married to a man who was probably one of the founding members of the powerful Tarquinian family Pinie. He had his own painted tomb, known today as the Giglioli Tomb, and was thus of Volsinian origins.

The same votive deposit also yielded terracotta heads of women set on molded bases that date from the late sixth to the fourth centuries BCE. Clearly connected to a small hour-glass tufa altar nearby was a *thesauros*, a stone container with a hole in the cover into which coin offerings could be inserted (Frascarelli 2012). Among the 221 coins found here were bronze asses dating to between 15–7 BCE, an Octavian coin, and Augustan asses from 15–16 CE. They are a clear demonstration that the site was still considered sacred long after its destruction by the Romans in the mid-third century BCE. DNA analysis has also identified the fragments of wood present in the *thesauros* as *Vitis vinifera*, the cultivated vine. In view of the ancient Greek name for Velzna, namely, Oinarea (“where wine flows”) (Heurgon 1969), this is an important paleo-botanic element.

Further confirmation of the sanctuary’s importance during the Roman period is provided by another exceptional find, a marble bust of a male dignitary from the Severan period (late second-early third century CE). Buried in a ditch next to the temple and the votive deposits, it seems to have been an act of *pietas* made by a high-ranking personage and was perhaps related to the activities of the sanctuary in Roman times.

A third Archaic temple, Temple C, was found in association with shards of fine Attic pottery and various deposits with bronze chariot elements. The significance of the much later burials of children (fourth–third century BCE) found here still needs further study, but they can probably be seen in relation to the divinities worshipped (Mallegni 2012).

An excavation has recently been begun in one of the countless artificial cavities that characterize the urban area of the city on top of the tufa plateau of modern-day Orvieto. Over 1200 were listed in a census undertaken under the special law for the reclamation of the city’s cliffs. Their range in time is

vast (Cavallo 1995). One of the first mentions was in the Renaissance when the remains of what was probably an Iron Age cave burial came to light during the excavation for what is now known as Saint Patrick's well (Tamburini 2007: 84). With the flourishing of the Etruscan settlement of Velzna, a network of tunnels and cavities, most of which were connected to the water supply, were subsequently created (for a listing of the types of man-made cavities of Etruscan times, see C. Bizzarri 2007).

The archaeological dig in a "grotto" in the historical center of Orvieto – in its southwestern portion – was begun in May 2012 (C. Bizzarri 2013). This cavity is characterized by its continuous use and the scientific approach of the current excavation. Interest is no longer centered on the individual periods of use but represents an attempt at a global recovery of its history. From an anthropological point of view, it provides what might be called a cross-section of life in the city. Moving back into time from the modern floor level, the strata reveal that the cavity was used as a carpentry workshop, as well as a kiln by the Riccardi brothers, internationally known nineteenth-century forgers who made the famous "colossi" sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (for the "scientific" study of the statues see Richter 1937 and [Chapter 29](#)). Currently, the excavation is concentrating on a room with a square ground plan, and with steps at the side directly cut into the volcanic stone. A first level containing solely archaeological material was found three meters below the modern cellar floor. On the basis of the pottery fragments, it can be dated to the fifth century BCE. An Etruscan tunnel, c.5 meters long, connected this cavity with another similar one. How deep they were still remains to be seen. The considerable amount of material found includes open shapes in gray bucchero, fragments of black bucchero, Attic black- and red-figure pottery, numerous fragmentary ollas, braziers, dolia, basins, roofing tiles in a reddish impasto, and some terracotta architectural decorations. The basically square cavity initially measured 4×4 meters, which increased to 5×5 meters the lower down the excavation went. Of particular interest is the considerable number of incised letters and short graffiti on gray bucchero bowls and on the rims of common ware closed shapes. Protohistoric pottery found in the fifth-century BCE strata, with fragments of large vases decorated in graffito and bowls with bosses, add to our knowledge of this period on the plateau of Orvieto. It is too early to hazard a guess as to how this room in the shape of a truncated pyramid functioned. It does not seem to have been a cistern, since it lacks the waterproof lining typical of such structures from Etruscan times on. The shape also differs considerably from the water shafts (wells) in the area of Volsinii. There also seem to be no signs of quarrying on the walls. Of special note is the fact that this area is on the brow of the cliff, visually connected to the area of Campo della Fiera, where the *Fanum Voltumnae* was located.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the urban necropoleis along the base

of the cliff were subjected to what was essentially plundering. It was not until the 1960s that scientific studies were undertaken (M. Bizzarri 1962, 1966). Excavations in the southern necropolis of Cannicella, where a marble nude, the so-called Venus (but more probably a divinity of the underworld), had been found, took place during the 1980s and the 1990s when protective roofing was added to help its preservation. As in other sacred sites in Etruria, the sanctuary in the necropolis was connected to funerary rites for the deceased and its boundaries were more clearly defined in the 1990s excavation. An acroterium with the matricide of Orestes and Clytemnestra uncovering her breast to remind him that she is his mother dates to the late Archaic period (Stopponi 1991: 1142–1150; 2012) and belonged to the funerary temple. It is now in the National Archeological Museum in Orvieto.

The other monumental necropolis to the north, Crocifisso del Tufo, seems to be part of the ring that once ran all around the cliff in Etruscan times. Anna Eugenia Feruglio studied it anew, followed by Paolo Bruschetti (2012) who focused on the material in storage. The data throw light on some of the lesser-known phases of Orvieto's history, such as the Protohistoric and Orientalizing periods, whose importance must be reassessed. This necropolis is particularly important because it allows us to connect the layout of the tombs organized in specific spaces with the underlying social system. The orderly sequence of tombs, all alike, reveals an egalitarian structure that was probably also applied to the organization of the city with its infrastructure of tunnels and cisterns regulating the water supply. The countryside was probably also similarly organized, with crop rotation in fields that were clearly marked by boundary stones (see further, [Chapter 2](#) with [Figure 2.3](#)). (During the fifth century BCE famine in Rome, grain was sent to the city via the Tiber, the main course of the river controlled only by Velzna: Colonna 1985a).

3. Tarquinia/Tarchna

Tarchna, a UNESCO World Heritage site together with the tombs of the Cerveteri–Banditaccia necropolis (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1158>), has always been particularly important in the Etruscan confederation in view both of its religious role connected to the mythological Tarconte and its frescoes (see further, [Chapter 17](#)). In the mid-twentieth century, investigations of the painted tombs took a turn with the geophysical survey of the Lerici Foundation. Currently, around 200 painted tombs are known (of the c.6000 identified; see Steingraber 2006). They range in time from the end of the seventh century BCE (Tomb of the Panther) to the end of the second century BCE (see [Figures 17.1–4](#)). Outstanding examples of Italian knowhow in managing its archaeological heritage are the studies undertaken by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro in Rome (<http://www.icr.beniculturali.it/>) regarding

the preservation of Tarquinia's painted monuments. Currently their interiors can be viewed through glass installed at the entrance to the chambers. Where necessary, the paintings have been removed and some have been mounted on panels in the National Archaeological Museum in Palazzo Vitelleschi in the city.

Recent excavations in the Queen's Tumulus, in the Doganaccia necropolis, have also led to new discoveries about and a better understanding of the structure of the largest tumulus at Tarquinia, c.40 meters in diameter. The so-called Tumuli of the King and of the Queen reflect an eighth–seventh century BCE type of royal tomb found in Cyprus (of Homeric type, probably imported to Tarquinia by Eastern-Greek workmen (see further, [Chapter 11](#)). A staircase dug into the rock leads to a small platform (5.7 × 8 meters) in front of the funeral chamber. A coating of fine white plaster with traces of painted decoration covered the walls of the unroofed chamber. A tomb with two flanking rooms, discovered behind the Tumulus of the Queen, is the first example, and, therefore the prototype, of the two-chamber tombs (the so-called “Gemini Tombs”) of the “princely” or Orientalizing period in Etruria. On the basis of the materials found there (see Mandolesi and de Angelis 2011), this tumulus can be dated to the middle of the seventh century BCE.

The excavations in the Iron Age necropolis in the area of the Villa Bruschi are of particular importance for enhancing our knowledge about the funerary sphere in Etruria. An intact Villanovan cemetery has come to light, perhaps related to the village that must once have been in the area, and which, subsequently, became the necropolis of Monterozzi (Trucco, de Angelis, and Iaia 2003). The tombs were exceptionally well-preserved, documenting rituals connected to the funerary rites of one of the communities later to found Tarquinia. Beginning in 1998, 11 excavation campaigns were carried out. Of the 246 tombs excavated, 239 were cremation and only seven trench (*fossa*) tombs. On the basis of the human remains recovered, the temperature of the funeral pyre has been calculated at around 600–900 degrees centigrade (see further, [Chapter 13](#)). An impasto urn with the cremated remains, covered with a bowl or helmet depending on the sex, was placed inside a shaft, or in a few more important cases, in an ovoid nenfro container (*custodia litica*), at times together with part of the ashes. In children's tombs, the bowl-cover faced up while in the more important ones, it was wrapped in cloth and decorated with bronze chains and fibulas (ancient safety pins). Tomb goods consisting of three or four ceramic vases, lowered into the grave after the urn had been placed there, were present in 49 percent of the burials. In some cases, composite vessels, with more than one section, were probably related to offerings dedicated to the deceased or to the divinities of the underworld. The composition of the community itself is also of particular interest. There were many more adult women than men, 56 percent to 29 percent, respectively. The children's tombs, however, contrasted with the general values of the time,

with only 18 percent representing children under the age of 12 (Trucco et al. 2005).

The area where the urban center was located is now called Pian di Civita. Here, studies by Maria Bonghi Jovino and her team (*Tarchna* I, II, III, IV and Suppl. 1) have made it possible to document sacred structures of the Orientalizing period, in addition to the Archaic phases of the temple of the Ara della Regina. This *sacro-istituzionale* complex first developed in the Protohistoric period (tenth century BCE) with the tomb of a child who was probably epileptic (perhaps a sort of prodigy ritually sacrificed: Bonghi Jovino 2009), followed by the deposit with an axe, *lituus*-trumpet and shield (Bonghi Jovino 1987: 66; see [Figure 7.5](#)). These finds are particularly significant for they throw new light on a relatively little-known period connected to the Protohistoric phases upon which the exponential growth of the Etruscan urban center is based (see further, [Chapters 1 and 7](#)). A new project called “T.Arc.H.N.A. online” (Towards Archaeological Heritage New Accessibility, a slightly forced acronym) makes it possible to explore Etruscan Tarquinia’s heritage both in its original territory and in European Museums (<http://tarchna.tarchna.it/totemonline/>).

Gravisca

The site of Gravisca is on the coast. It functioned like other Mediterranean models of emporia (e.g., Naukratis in Egypt and al-Mina in Syria) where foreign merchants were permitted to set up trading centers in exchange for control by a dominating local class. The area is characterized by the presence of sanctuaries dedicated, among others, to Aphrodite and Demeter, who guaranteed the correctness of the transactions. The anchor donated by Sostratos, a proverbially wealthy merchant from Aegina of the sixth century BCE (Torelli 1971), was dedicated to Apollo (see further, [Chapter 6](#) with [Figure 6.3](#)). Recent excavations have brought to light a trench with votive material ranging from the sixth to the third centuries BCE, including a small bronze kouros, an attacking Mars, and numerous metal weapons, some in miniature. The deposit has been attributed to an unspecified chthonic female divinity. Various industrial facilities, mostly furnaces for the working of metal, both bronze and iron, were found in the vicinity, probably for the production of ex-votos, under the reassuring protection of the foreign divinities. The picture that emerges from this close association differs considerably from our general idea of a hieratic and silent cult area (Fiorini 2005).

Bisenzio

Bisenzio, located on the western shore of Lake Bolsena, is also in the territory of Tarquinia. Two of the most important examples of Villanovan bronzes – a perfume brazier and a biconical ash urn – come from the necropolis of Olmo Bello. The scenes depicted are connected to themes of agriculture, hunting, the family and contact with the world of the afterlife, a significant example of the complexity of the religious sphere at the peak of the Iron Age (Haynes 2000: 21–24; Menichetti 2000).

Musarna

Musarna, an Etruscan settlement of the Hellenistic period, is also in the same district. It provides an insight into the relatively traumatic progressive Romanization of the territory (see further, [Chapter 3](#)). The excavations up to 2003 by the French School at Rome have identified a thermal complex with an exceptional mosaic with an Etruscan inscription, pertinent to its use in the *caldarium*, in which Vel Alethna and Luvce Hulcnies are mentioned. They were probably two of the sponsors of the baths. The size and nature area of the habitation here, which consists of 12 *insulae* (city blocks) and walls with two gates (Broise and Jolivet 2004), are also of note.

4. Cerveteri/Caere/Cisra(Greek Agylla)

The Banditaccia necropolis is located in the area of neighboring Cerveteri, another important urban center in southern Etruria (on this necropolis see further, [Chapter 11](#)). A UNESCO World Heritage site, it is characterized by monumental tumuli (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1158>). Recently, a hypogeum of the Hellenistic period and a monumental lion in peperino dating to the Archaic period, practically intact, were brought to light next to the Tomb of the Painted Tile. The first of the two main excavations in the urban area is in the area of Vigna Parrocchiale in the central part of the plateau, which has been damaged by clandestine digs. The second is located on the southeastern edge of the plateau near one of the city gates, in loc. S. Antonio, with ongoing excavations by the universities of Urbino and Venice. A CNR project called “Progetto Caere” (<http://www.progettocaere.rm.cnr.it/index.htm>) is planning for digs and surface surveys in the area of Vigna Parrocchiale (see Moretti Sgubini and Ricciardi 2001; Moretti Sgubini 2002–2003). So far the remains of a monumental “cistern/quarry” have come to light. It was filled in at the beginning of the fifth century BCE when a sixth-century aristocratic residence was eliminated to make way for a temple and an elliptical unroofed building of a public nature. Since 1993, regular campaigns have been undertaken in loc. S. Antonio. The site extends from the Villanovan

period (ninth–eighth century BCE) to Roman times. Of particular interest is an Archaic “cistern / fountain” subsequently incorporated in the pronaos of the so-called Temple A in its late Archaic phase. A series of cisterns/quarries of building materials that served as support to the sacred structures are also significant here. It is in one of these temples that a magnificent Attic cup with the *Iliupersis* (the Sack of Troy) by Euphronios and Onesimos was dedicated to Heracle (Heracles). The kylix was clandestinely purloined and ultimately ended up in the Getty Museum in Malibu (Williams 1991). The dig in the S. Antonio area has made it possible to reconstruct the context from which the cup came and to include it among the material that, in line with recent agreements between foreign museums and the Italian government, was returned to its place of origin (for the exceptional importance of this agreement see: <http://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center/international-cultural-property-protection/bilateral-agreements/italy>). The famous krater painted and signed by Euphronios (see [Figure 30.1](#)) comes from the Grotte S. Angelo necropolis. It depicts the death of Sarpedon, son of Zeus and king of the Lycians, killed by Patroclus during the Trojan War. Illegally exported and bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the krater became the symbol of the operations involving the leading international museums and the Italian State (Silver 2005; see further, [Chapter 30](#)).

In the same plateau area of Cerveteri, a research project by Queen’s University at Kingston (Canada) excavated the “hypogeum of Clepsina” (Torelli and Fiorini 2009). The 2012 campaign uncovered a small, semi-subterranean structure, partly cut in the bedrock and partly built in blocks, and three wells, partially filled in during the Late Republican period. The earliest occupation though, recorded by earlier University of Perugia excavations, dates to the end of the eighth to the early seventh centuries BCE, while the latest, according to the inscription on the hypogeum, reaches the Severan period (Colivicchi 2012; 2015).

Pyrgi

The sanctuary of Pyrgi lies along the coast. Together with Tarquinian Gravisca, it is another example of an emporium or port of trade, and as such, it accumulated considerable wealth. As documented by Greek and Latin literary sources (Diodorus Siculus 15.3; Strabo 5.225–226), its fame extended far beyond the borders of Etruria. Recent studies have identified two distinct centers (Belelli Marchesini et al. 2012). The larger one, on the north, is characterized by monumentality due to the attention of the rulers of Caere (e.g., Thefarie Velianas). This was the site of the sanctuary of the goddess Uni, assimilated by the Phoenicians to Astarte, later flanked by Thesan, assimilated by the Greeks to Leucothea and Ilizia (Verzar 1980). Two

imposing temples to the two divinities were erected between the end of the sixth and the first half of the fifth centuries BCE. They were in tufa with complex terracotta architectural decorations that included the famous high relief with the saga of the “Seven against Thebes” (Temple A) (see further, [Chapter 26](#) with [Figure 26.2](#)).

An open cult area (Area C) has been documented between the two buildings. It was here that the three famous gold plaques with inscriptions in Etruscan and Phoenician had been ritually deposited. They refer to the dedication of Temple B by the “king” of Caere, Thefarie Velianas. The southern nucleus has no particular architectural features, but the wealth of votive offerings is impressive. The divinities worshipped there were the goddess Cavatha and her consort Aplu/Śuri (Apollo) (according to Jannot 2005: 146), but also just Śuri (see Turfa 2012: 66). The numerous Attic black- and red-figure vases were often grouped in votive deposits varying in shape and size, in addition to bronze artifacts and terracotta statues (Baglione and Beelli Marchesini 2013).

5. Vulci

In Vulci, one of the leading settlements controlling the southern sector of Etruria (Moretti Sgubini 2006), an Archaic tomb has recently come to light (Moretti Sgubini 2002–2003). It is known as the Tomb of the Sphinx after a nenfro sphinx c.50 centimeters long, probably set at the entrance to protect the deceased and accompany them to the underworld. The tomb is in the important necropolis of Osteria in which some of the most important hypogea, including the Orientalizing Tomb of the Sun and the Moon, were found (for interesting aerial research on the necropolis see Pocobelli 2007). The archaeological park of Vulci has been the driving force behind a series of studies and surveys that have made for a better understanding of the urban layout of the Hellenistic–Roman phase as well as the structure of the monumental fourth-century BCE walls (<http://english.vulci.it/mediacenter/FE/home.aspx>). The park also includes the well-known François Tomb, one of the most important examples of Etruscan paintings, revealing a unique Etruscan view of the episode in which Macstarna/Servius Tullius is shown while helping one of the Vibenna brothers (Buranelli 1987; see further, [Chapters 17](#) and [25](#)).

6. Veio/Vei

Thanks to the “Progetto Veio,” sponsored by the Soprintendenza per l’Etruria Meridionale and several professorships at the University of Rome, study of

the Portonaccio sanctuary area, excavated in the first half of the twentieth century, has resumed. The objective is that of providing long-awaited answers to various questions raised by the systematic publication of the area. Interest was also centered on Piazza d'Armi, where Gilda Bartoloni and Francesca Boitani further investigated the so-called *oikos* and documented the layout of the private buildings, apparently organized in a regular layout as early as the Archaic period. Traces of an ancestor cult existed in Campetti as far back as the first half of the ninth century. As revealed by the votive deposit of Veio-Campetti (Bartoloni et al. 2013), it continued throughout the history of Etruscan Veio up to around the end of the fifth century BCE. An important element in the religiosity of Iron Age and subsequent populations is the relationship with the deceased of one's family or group, protectors of the living and consequently venerated as such. The remains of a late Bronze Age settlement have also been identified in the historical city, of particular significance with regards to the development of the territorial population before the formation of the city itself. The most striking data from the necropoleis come from the laboratory excavation and subsequent restoration of Tomb 1036 of Casale del Fosso, undertaken 100 years after its discovery (the tomb was found in 1915 and presented in 2001). It was the tomb of a political and religious leader who was buried around the middle of the eighth century BCE with the symbolic objects of his power and authority: a mace, two bilobate shields, two cuirass disks as well as a crested helmet, three spears, a short sword and an axe (Moretti Sgubini 2002–2003: 135).

7. Sovana

Sovana is famous for the so-called Ildebranda Tomb, named after Ildebrando Aldobrandeschi of Sovana, who served as Pope Gregory VII from 1073 to 1085. Recently, another important funerary monument known as the Tomb of the Winged Demons has been brought to light, thanks to collaboration between the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana and the University of Venice (Maggiani, Barbieri, and Pellegrini 2005).

Paradoxically, the decorative elements were in good shape because the tomb had collapsed in antiquity. The aedicule is at the center of a terrace around 8 meters long. It has a deep central room. Inside the figure of the deceased is shown reclining for the banquet holding the patera (a shallow drinking cup) in his right hand. The traces of color still extant are of particular interest (Barbieri, Cuniglio, and Pallecchi 2006). Two statues of winged female demons, probably Vanth figures, appear on either side of the central niche. The imposing marine demon with wings and a fish tail in the gable may be Scylla, as in the Tomb of the Siren (for Scylla and the Etruscans see Harrison 2013: 1099–1100). Two lions were placed symmetrically on the area in front

of the facade, an element not previously encountered in Sovana.

8. Conclusion

Excavations continue to cast new light on pre-Etruscan and Etruscan civilization in southern Etruria and demonstrate the need both for further archaeological exploration and critical studies of the material yielded by past excavations. The application of newer forms of scientific analysis, such as archaeometrical analysis, has enhanced the traditional picture of one of the most important ancient civilizations in Italy. The work of international teams over the last few decades, moreover, has proven of prime importance in furthering our understanding of the Etruscans' life, culture, and contributions.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Haynes 2000 provides a comprehensive survey of Etruscan civilization in which she discusses well-known aspects of their culture together with new discoveries up until her publication date. Torelli 2001, edited by a leading Etruscologist, remains one of the best works on the Etruscans: extremely well-illustrated with color photographs, maps and plans, it represents a comprehensive and up-to-date catalogue that accompanied an exhibition on the Etruscans at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. The essays cover topics as varied as the forms and styles of Etruscan art and architecture to issues related to their origins and economic, social and political forms. Torelli also co-edited another catalogue (Torelli and Moretti Sgubini 2008) of a show held in Rome, on the four major Etruscan cities in modern Latium (Tarquinia, Cerveteri, Veii, and Vulci) with important contributions by leading scholars. Leighton 2004 offers an updated overview of history of Tarquinia, one of the most important cities in southern Etruria, while Mandolesi and de Angelis 2011 discusses one of the site's newly discovered tombs (the *Tumulo della Regina*). Turfa 2013 is the most recent collection of contributions made by many American and European Etruscologists: southern Etruria is well-represented in articles by Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni (Tarquinia), Maria Paola Baglione (Pyrgi), and Simonetta Stopponi (Orvieto, Campo della Fiera excavation). The Foundation for the Museum Claudio Faina in Orvieto publishes the papers given at the annual meetings with extraordinary regularity, and for Inner Southern Etruria, the proceedings of the 2004 conference are particularly meaningful (Della Fina 2005). For Orvieto and its connection with Bolsena, updated information can be found in the catalogue edited by Della Fina and

Pellegrini 2013 in which there are important contributions by F. Roncalli (Etruscan sanctuaries of Velzna), P. Bruschetti (necropoleis) and G. Camporeale (natural resources, local crafts and artisans). Finally, there is a new set of volumes, co-edited by Nancy de Grummond and Lisa Pieraccini, that will be published by the University of Texas Press; the first one focuses on the city of Caere and it will be followed by one on Veii. The chapters are written by scholars and intended for English readers interested in up-to-date information about the 12 most important Etruscan cities.

CHAPTER 10

Etruscan Domestic Architecture, Hydraulic Engineering, and Water Management Technologies *Innovations and Legacy to Rome*

Claudio Bizzarri and David Soren

1. Introduction

As a result of new excavations and recent reconsiderations about Etruscan architecture, along with the adoption of more holistic anthropological, art historical, and philological approaches, a clearer picture about Etruscan contributions to and innovations within the area of architectural technology has emerged. Despite the scant traces of original buildings – due to their construction primarily with materials such as terracotta, mudbrick and wood (e.g., oak, elm and hornbeam) – many of their technological innovations can be understood. As a result, the Etruscans are now viewed as dynamic innovators in the fields of architecture and engineering rather than as mere copiers of the Greeks who used low-quality materials to build houses, water channels (*cuniculi*), dams and pools.

In the past, the study of Etruscan architecture was limited by the paucity of sites apart from necropoleis (see further, [Chapter 11](#)). Sequential phases of Etruscan sites have been particularly elusive and when houses were uncovered, they were often not well published. In addition, the very idea of an “Etruscan” architecture may be disputed, given the highly individualized nature of their major urban centers and the regional characteristic of some of their artistic traditions.

This chapter explores the ways in which Etruscan architects refined and blended technologies from Near Eastern and Greek cultures, as well as the Romans, and applied them to their own constructions. It traces the impact of the Etruscans not only in private architecture (e.g., the house plan), but also at southern Tuscan sites such as Mezzomiglio (locality of Chianciano Terme) where an ancient spa demonstrates that their ability to innovate and adjust outside influences to their own needs continued well into Roman times.

2. Domestic Architecture

Villanovan Huts

During the Iron Age (1000–700 BCE), the inhabitants of central Italy lived in huts either dug down into bedrock or given a foundation of rubble stones on which were built walls featuring a series of posts linked by wattle and daub with clay packing. Over the walls were hip roofs that sloped down on all four sides, sometimes pierced with a smoke hole in the front or center so that cooking stands or a hearth might be used inside. Reproductions of these dwellings appear in the terracotta or bronze cinerary hut urns from southern Etruria and Latium, which show the detailed structure of the roof and beams with the characteristic shape known as the “solar boat” decoration (e.g., two duck heads facing alternately left and right) placed on top of the roof (Dolfini 2004).

In earlier scholarship, these oval, square or rectangular huts, which measured about 10 square meters, were considered by scholars individually and thought always to house entire families. Ethnographic comparisons and new evidence, however, tell a different story. The huts are now seen as part of a complex belonging to one family group or a small clan whereby individuals or several people might live in one hut while adjacent ones were used to store food or as cooking places. There were also animal pens and perhaps a cactus fence around the complex, delineating a nuclear family or clan settlement. Therefore the former “one hut, one family” idea seems not always to have been true in Etruria (see further, Colantoni 2012).

Satricum

At Satricum, 37 miles southeast of Rome in Latium, Etruscologists have had the rare opportunity to observe Villanovan and Etruscan architecture over many years and several phases of construction. During the seventh century BCE, huts evolved into more substantial structures (Maaskant-Kleibrink 1987, 1991: 73–93; Gnade 2010; Colantoni 2012: 25–6), each with its own specific functions. The site, uncovered in the Dutch excavations of the 1970s and 1980s, displays three important phases. 47 huts belonging to Period 1 – most of the eighth century BCE – have been found; their functions range from dwellings to cooking sheds. The latter were identified from cooking ware recovered along with ash and animal bones. In Period 2, which continued into the seventh century, the size of the huts increased significantly, reaching 30

square meters of total area compared to only 10 in Period 1.

No palaces or structures to suggest sharp demarcation between ruler and ruled in Periods 1 and 2 have been found at Satricum. By comparison with contemporary civilizations in the Near East and Egypt, the settlers on the Palatine Hill in Rome or at San Giovenale (see further, below), Satricum could be considered architecturally primitive (Balland 1984: 57–80; Angelelli and Falzone 1999: 5–32; Carandini and Cappelli 2000).

During Period 3 (the sixth century BCE), the traditional hut complexes of the first two periods were replaced by houses situated on firm stone foundations which were grouped into several pairs and arranged to form two courtyard areas, along with several smaller houses nearby (Maaskant-Kleibrink 1987, 1991; Colantoni 2012: 24–26). These structures appeared to be evolved, redesigned, and more sophisticated versions of the areas of the Iron Age huts of periods 1 and 2. All were also grouped around a major water basin.

The evolution at Satricum from open areas between huts to courtyard plans linking together the long rectangular house complexes suggests that the possible next step architecturally was the atrium house form later found at sites such as Pompeii, Stabiae, and Herculaneum in the Roman period. There, the central courtyard was enclosed within the house and reduced in size so that it contained a rectangular opening in the ceiling and roof (*compluvium*) to admit rainwater into a sunken water-gathering mini-pool (*impluvium*) so that it could be stored in a cistern below. Such house forms are known to have evolved by the sixth century BCE because of early finds at the eastern end of the Roman Forum on the slope of the Palatine as well as at the site of Roselle near Grosseto in Tuscany (see further, below).

Above all, the Satricum excavations demonstrate that Villanovan and early Etruscan huts often had varying functions and could be part of an entire area of huts within an enclosure. These simple forms of construction had a long life in Etruria, and examples continued well into the Roman Imperial period. The Augustan writer Vitruvius (2.8.20), for example, cautioned against using wattle and daub due to the constant risk of fire and buildings going up like a torch. He also connected the hut structure to an ancient architectural typology:

From such specimens [i.e., the hut of Romulus on the Palatine and the thatched roofs of temples which survived in the time of Vitruvius] we can draw our inferences with regard to the devices used in the buildings of antiquity and conclude that they (the old structures) were similar (*Ita his signis de antiquis inuentionibus aedificiorum sic ea fuisse ratiocinantes possumus iudicare*)

(Vitruvius 2.1.6; translated by M. H. Morgan 1960).

San Giovenale

The Swedish excavations at San Giovenale, near Blera to the northwest of Rome, have revealed several early Iron Age building types, one with low rubble walls linking timber poles which reinforced the walls of interwoven branches coated with clay mixed with straw. Hip roofs of thatch completed the structure. Another type of house at San Giovenale featured channels dug down into the volcanic tufa to support the wattle and daub walls. In a later phase, postholes appeared inside the house as well as around the perimeter. The walls had windows and the roof had a smoke hole for the interior hearth. Often, there was also a front porch (Iaia and Mandolesi 1993; Karlsson 2006).

Fidene

At Fidene (about five miles north of Rome on the Via Salaria), a rectangular hut was destroyed by fire around 800 BCE (Martinelli 2004). The blaze preserved many of the contents of the fairly large structure (6.2×5.2 meters in size, or just over 30 square meters, the size of the biggest huts at Satricum). Postholes secured walls that were composed of molded bricks made of clay, crushed-up ceramic and straw. The hip roof had support from four internal posts.

Inside, clay andirons flanked a hearth near the center. Rather than have a variety of huts for different purposes, this one large structure was divided up into sections for various activities, so that the interior functioned as a work area and, possibly, as a sleeping space. The northern wall was lined with four *dolia* (large storage jars) partially sunken into the clay floor (De Santis, Merlo, and De Grossi Mazzorin 1998). The eastern area seemed to contain poorly preserved elm furniture, possibly for chairs and/or beds. In the southeast corner lay the remains of the oldest preserved cat ever found in Italy. Another storage area in the southwest corner appeared to be built of piled stones. Finally, a simple portico shaded the entry to the west.

Domestic architecture at other sites

During the seventh century BCE, two- or three-room houses built with mudbrick walls within a wooden framework linked by postholes appeared at a number of sites, including Accesa / Massa Marittima (a lakefront area near Grosseto), San Giovenale and Veii (Camporeale 1997; Camporeale and Giuntoli 2000). Generally, the Orientalizing period marks the time of the transition from hut architecture to the small rectangular house (Donati 1994:

2000). The only structures to maintain the hut or *capanna* look were older sacred buildings, which, when necessary, were rebuilt numerous times in traditional materials. Examples include the so-called *Casa Romuli* or House of Romulus on the Palatine Hill in Rome, the structure on the acropolis at Satricum, and the *capanna* buildings discovered in the recent excavations in the chora of Adria in northeastern Italy, which were found to continue into later periods (Harari and Paltineri 2000: 65–74).

House construction techniques could be variable but were always simple due to the lack of fine stone. Stone foundations with strong wooden posts linked by earth walls comprised of mud and intervening branches or wattles and straw were popular from the Early Iron Age into the Roman period, as we have seen. Walls linking the posts or built on their own might be made of unfired bricks (mudbrick) or they could be constructed in the *pisé* technique whereby a damp mixture of earth, gravel or small stones, along with sand and clay, was placed inside an externally supported frame of interlinked twigs and branches and left to dry; it was often lime-washed later for added protection.

About 650 BCE, pan and cover tiles relating to Laconian or Corinthian types began to be used, and the houses were often given a portico on the long side at the entry. The diminutive size of the houses suggests that many activities still continued outside and that the major change to large structures with more daily living occurring inside happened only in the early Archaic period. The exception to this in the Orientalizing period could have been the homes of the elite who built monumental tombs at sites such as Cerveteri, but, to date, such structures have not been identified with certainty. It is unlikely that these aristocrats would have lived in simple dwellings while having such remarkable tombs, and it is for that reason that structures such as those found at Poggio Civitate near Murlo are usually identified as elite dwellings (see further, below). However, it may be that during the Orientalizing period the emphasis was on the tomb and the afterlife more than on the private dwelling. If the monumental buildings at Murlo and Acquarossa were not elite homes but rather community centers, then we are left only with the giant tumuli as the architectural evidence of their wealth.

It may, therefore, not be until the Archaic period that the houses of the rich became more elaborate in Etruria, no doubt influenced by increasing contact with the Greek world. Apparently for the Etruscan elite with pretensions of grandeur, Greece, in particular, meant monumentality, status, elitism, beauty, worldliness, and a sense of high aesthetics. In this period, the simple truss is used in building construction and in at least one instance (e.g., the Mengarelli Tumulus in the Nuovo Recinto of the Banditaccia cemetery of Cerveteri), a truss is actually shown in relief in the tomb (Marini 2010: 12). Here it is also possible to see the transition from the round hut plan to the idea of the long-house model. The increasing sophistication of the aristocratic house may also be seen in the Tomb of the Shields and Chairs from Cerveteri (c.600 BCE)

(Figure 10.1), which features a *dromos* leading down to a central atrium, and three rooms opening off at the back, two side rooms and a series of couches. The shields shown in relief suggest the power and military connections of the family and the chairs take the form of thrones with footstools that also emphasize the regal nature of the deceased family members.

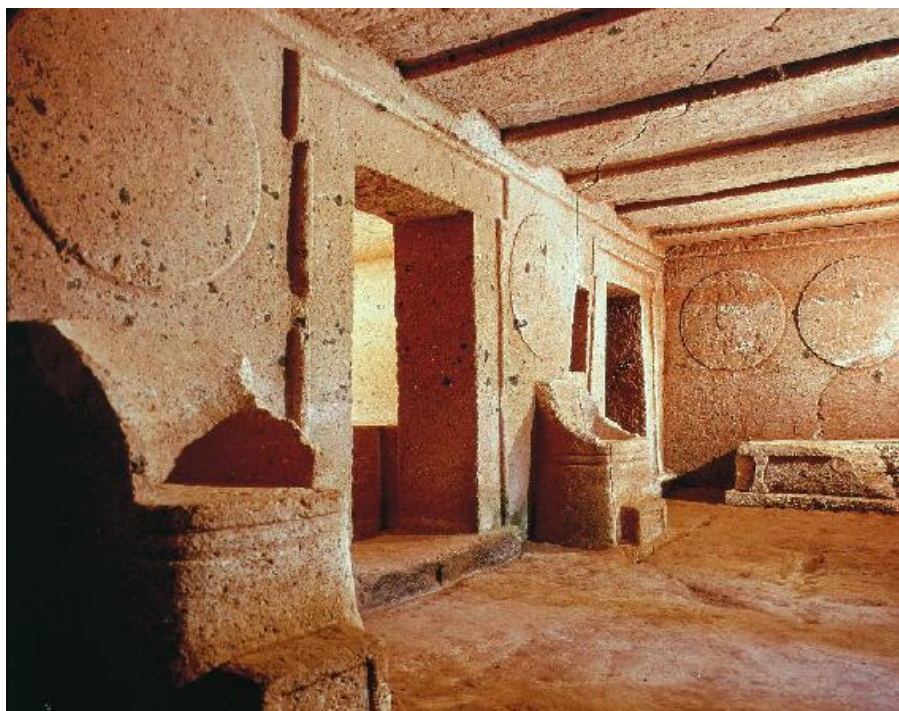


Figure 10.1 Tomb of the Shields and Chairs, interior, early sixth century BCE. From Caere.

Photo: The Art Archive/Gianni Dagli Orti.

Poggio Civitate

Of particular importance to any discussion of Etruscan domestic architecture is the remarkable and controversial “Palace” of Murlo, at Poggio Civitate, built in its first form in the seventh century BCE, perhaps between 675 and 650 BCE, and then destroyed by accidental (?) burning around 610 BCE (Nielsen and Tuck 2001; Tuck 2006: 130–135; see also Chapter 8). The site’s monumental Orientalizing buildings included two structures plus a separate portico, the latter containing a workshop filled with spindle whorls for weaving, pottery and roof tiles (see Figure 8.1). Tiles appear to have been made on the premises, and the fire seems to have taken the residents by

surprise since a drying tile contains a footprint, possibly of someone fleeing from the structure. The domestic structure may have been what Ingrid Edlund-Berry has termed “ritually dismantled”; that is, taken apart for ritual reasons, an Etruscan practice that might occur after the gods had ordered it (Edlund-Berry 1994: 16–28). Opinions vary, however, regarding the reason for its destruction, while more recent excavation of the site suggests more widespread destruction in the later Archaic period rather than just the intentional ritual dismantlement of one building.

During the sixth century, the original monumental building was replaced by a larger and more sophisticated version (Tuck 2010: 93–104). In fact, the second structure, whatever its function, is one of the largest buildings known in the Mediterranean from the Archaic period (see [Figure 8.2](#)). The new building featured a secondary courtyard to the south, possibly for work activities. The central courtyard of the main structure was surrounded by a series of rooms that did not appear to link with one another. The northeastern-most two rooms have been identified as a possible watchtower.

The purpose of Poggio Civitate’s monumental building and its predecessor remains a mystery, but some scholars consider it a palace, taking into consideration the fictile decorations which present scenes of elite banqueting, elegant ladies with parasols and fans, and fine hunting dogs. Also suggestive is its sheer size: at 60 × 61.85 meters, it covered almost 3800 square meters. But the original excavator, Kyle Phillips, believed that it more closely resembled a large meeting hall which might form the headquarters of a local Etruscan league of communities (Phillips 1993). Nearby was found a well which provided water for the structure, and there were also iron ore roasting ovens, adding fuel to the argument that this may have been a monumental community center. The roof, moreover, contained striking acroteria, including the so-called Murlo “cowboys” with wide-brimmed hats (see [Figure 8.3](#)) that have parallels in figures from Capecetrano.

Acquarossa

Smaller than the Archaic complex at Poggio Civitate is a similar, contemporary construction at Acquarossa near Viterbo, dating to c.600 BCE (Östenberg 1975; Rysted 2001: 23–27; Meyers 2010: 2–5). There, Swedish excavations have unearthed several buildings placed at right angles, thus creating a courtyard. Building A is c.10 meters long and Building C is 25 meters; smaller structures are located nearby. The same questions have been asked about this smaller complex as at Murlo, especially since both sites feature decorative simas, frieze plaques, antefixes, and acroteria. Again the question of palace or community center arises.

Roselle and Marzabotto

At Roselle (Rusellae), an important house, perhaps datable to the first half of the sixth century BCE, was uncovered in the 1980s by the University of Florence: the House of the Impluvium (*Casa dell'Impluvium*) (Donati 1994). It was entered through a portico along the front featuring four wooden posts. This led into a large space or reception area that resembled the *tablinum* normally found at the rear of Roman houses just behind the atrium. Turning right from this room, a large central atrium of c.300 square meters in size appears. It resembles an atrium in a typical Pompeian house in that it has both a *compluvium* and *impluvium*. The opening in the roof was supported by four posts, resembling the tetrastyle atrium house described by Vitruvius (6.3.1) as the *atrium tuscanicum*, indicating that it was an Etruscan invention. The cistern at one end of the courtyard contained a decorative *aedicula* above it. Opening off of the *tablinum* area were two rooms to the left that contained small hearths; the right-hand one also included a raised area that likely served as a *thalamos* or bedchamber. Finally, two additional larger rooms opened directly onto the atrium. These may have been the *triclinium* (dining room) and a kitchen to serve it.

The large house at Roselle is but one of a number of structures with atria dating to the later Archaic period, among them a house on the slopes of the Palatine Hill (the so-called Domus 3) constructed during the Etruscan occupation of Rome (Holloway 1994: 63, 67). In a large complex at Gonfienti, near Prato in Tuscany, another *atrium cum impluvium* arrangement has been noted (Cifani 2008: 275), while still others are known at Marzabotto, a working-class Etruscan town in what is now the province of Bologna, the Etruscan Felsina (Govi 2007; 2008: 137–146). At the latter site, for example, the houses are of good size, but not palaces, and seem stamped out as if from a cookie-cutter, with slight variations. They have tile roofs, and stone foundations on which were set mudbrick or *opus craticium* walls. Each house was almost 800 square meters in size, and featured an atrium that was likely testudinate or fully roofed over, so that the beams rested directly onto the walls and there were no interior columns. They also included small rooms that appeared to function as toilets, with an open channel leading out to the sewer system, paralleling the northern Greek town of Olynthos. Thus, by the Classical period, the atrium house form as known later at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae was well-established in central Italy, functioning as one of the Etruscans' most important innovations and legacies to Rome.

Spina and Adria

At Spina and Adria, Etruscan houses were adapted to rest on wooden posts that reached down into the water and enabled housing systems that are the predecessors of contemporary Venetian ones; they also spring from a long line of ancient structures adapted to marshy, watery sites (Torelli 1993: 53–70; Bonomi 1991). This is the stilt or Palafitte-style house form, dating back to the later Neolithic period in Italy and consisting of piles of timber driven into the ground, above which the house was built, significantly above the water level and thus protected from flooding.

Excavations at Adria, inland from the port area in an agrarian chora region at San Cassiano di Crespino 10 miles to the southwest on the northern bank of the Po delta, have revealed traces of Etruscan-style non-Palafitte dwellings built with foundations made of an igneous local stone called trachyte and featuring walls of clay mixed with straw (Harari and Paltineri 2000: 65–73; Robino, Paltineri, and Smoquina 2009). These Archaic structures have early Corinthian-style tiled roofs. Excavations by the University of Pavia have also uncovered the trachyte quarry nearby.

The site, destroyed by fire, has preserved many features of the original structures, including clay bricks used in the wall construction, the local straw mixed in with it, and the beaten-earth flooring of clay mixed with straw or chaff. It has been disputed for many years as to whether the area was a Greek or Etruscan settlement or both, established for the purposes of promoting the large trade between Etruria and Greece through the only major harbor areas along the northeastern area of the Italian coast. The excavations at Atria therefore demonstrate a strong Etruscan presence in the later Archaic period even though the area is known for a local group, the Veneti.

Vetulonia

Much is now being learned about Etruscan domestic architecture of the Hellenistic period, the time of Etruria's precipitous decline. New excavations at Vetulonia 120 miles north of Rome have revealed an area of houses dating to the third century BCE with many of their contents intact due to their destruction by fire (Neri 2013). For the first time, significant examples of well-preserved domestic architecture, albeit from a time later than Etruria's glory days, have been found. The houses rest on stone foundations and have walls for their ground floor; a second story built in the traditional mudbrick or *opus craticium* style has been found collapsed into the first floor. That the disaster occurred well into the third century BCE is attested by the finding of Roman coins. The site is still at the beginning of excavation and has only uncovered storerooms, but its enthusiastic excavator, Simona Rafanelli, hopes for a "Pompeii of ancient Etruria" (Lorenzi 2012).

Cetamura del Chianti

Not every Etruscan community was a major center with beautiful architecture for the elite or even formulaic housing for workers. The excavation of Cetamura del Chianti, located to the east of Volterra, the south of Florence, the west of Arezzo and to the north of Siena, illustrates the features of a rustic settlement (de Grummond 2000, 2009, 2014). Here, rural artisans made most of the materials needed for survival and dedicated modest offerings at a nearby sanctuary to little-known Etruscan divinities. Cetamura is easily overlooked because it showed how the other half lived in Etruria between 300 and 75 BCE. A simple artisan's quarter also provides evidence of pottery kilns, cisterns for water storage, a weaving shed, and evidence of iron production.

In Zone II, a slope located below the site's acropolis (Zone I), remains dating back to the Archaic period have been located, but the main phase is the Hellenistic one, divided into two subphases: 300–150 BCE and 150 to the first century BCE. In both of these phases, local sandstone was primarily used for the construction of wall foundations. During the first phase, stones of homogeneous size were carefully selected, while in the later period, larger blocks alternated with smaller-sized rocks. The upper parts of the walls are not preserved but may have been in *opus craticium*, clay bricks, wood posts linked with mudbrick or in some cases made with small or large stones, depending on whether or not a second floor was required.

There are no structures that dazzle the eye and little in the way of artifacts of aesthetic delight at this rural Etruscan site. The excavators have reconstructed a vision of the life of the non-elites of the area and their transitory wood constructions of oak, hornbeam, and beech, always threatened by fire, along with structures featuring local sandstone. Although the diet of the villagers was surprisingly varied, there is little to suggest that Cetamura was anything more than a modest Etruscan village. Nevertheless, its chronology is complex and traces the community from its beginnings during the Archaic period to its eventual transformation into a Roman villa and finally to a medieval fort.

3. Hydraulics and Water Management

The Roman Forum and the Cloaca Maxima

The acts of draining Rome's forum area at the end of the seventh century BCE and, 100 years later, constructing the Temple of Jupiter, which gave the city a colossal architectural symbol visible from below at a great distance, were the two most significant events that differentiated Rome from the modest town it was during the Iron Age. In particular, the forum drainage allowed the city to spread out and grow, and thereby become one of the most important in Italy.

Both Etruscan and Greek technological innovations played a major role when the Tarquins arrived in Rome and set about developing and transforming the city. The Etruscan communities, in general, had particular connections to the architecture on the east Greek island of Samos (Hopkins 2010: 121). One of these includes the use of water channels (*cuniculi*) which soon became a hallmark of Etruscan hydraulics, an area that had been widely pursued in the east Greek world and for which the tyrant Polycrates of Samos (ruling 538–522 BCE) was particularly known. He constructed the Tunnel of Eupalinos, named for a renowned engineer from Megara, as part of an aqueduct system, creating the first known tunnel to have been dug out from both ends simultaneously, using principles of basic geometry established by Euclid to create one of the wonders of ancient Greek civilization (it was 3399 feet long) (Kienast 1995; Olson 2012: 25–34). To ensure that he did not miscalculate, Eupalinos angled his first tunnel slightly so that the second one would meet it.

It is impossible for us to know at present who was responsible for the visionary, society-changing programs and constructions in Etruria and Latium from the seventh century on. We know from Vitruvius (10.2.11) that the sixth century BCE was the time of the development of the crane driven by a large rotating wheel with men inside to turn it, an invention refined by Chersiphron and Metagenes of Crete who worked on the enormous Artemis Temple at Ephesos in western Anatolia. Thus the mega-temple was made possible by technological developments of Greeks in the Archaic period (Coulton 1974) and the Etruscans took advantage of this in their construction of the enormous Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

Meeting centers such as the *Fanum Voltumnae* (at Campo della Fiera outside of modern Orvieto; see further, [Chapter 9](#)) allowed the various Etruscan communities to share information, and these may have included architectural projects and engineering technologies (Stopponi 2002–2003: 109–18). In addition, both Greek and Near Eastern connections, along with a desire to harness the abundant streams and springs of Etruria, led to increasing sophistication in the Etruscan knowledge of hydraulics and waterworks from the Archaic period onwards (Cascianelli 1991: 43–76).

At the end of the Orientalizing period, the new Etruscan rulers of Rome took over what was an architectural backwater and realized that they needed to provide extensive drainage for the swampy area that later became the forum. Suitable only as a necropolis or for the construction of impermanent huts, the pre-forum area was a valley between hills subject to periodic flooding from

the Tiber River. The project of filling in and raising the level of the forum, as described by Albert Ammerman (1990), reflects a visionary program of urban development. By harnessing the streams flowing into the forum (such as the *Velabrum*) and providing a drainage system (still in part used today) known as the *Cloaca Maxima*, the Etruscans made it possible for the great buildings of the forum to exist and be maintained over the centuries. The Cloaca was such an important structural element that near the Comitium are the remains of the temple of Cloacina, a small circular building dedicated to the goddess Venus in one of her many aspects (Pliny *Natural History* 15.36; Livy *History of Rome* 3.48).

The Pool in the Portonaccio Sanctuary of Menerva at Veii

The draining and elevation of Rome's forum and its rescue from the vagaries of the Tiber, combined with the channeling of hillside streams into a sewer system, was one of many contributions of the Etruscans to architecture involving water. At Veii just north of Rome, the principal sanctuary developed in the seventh century BCE was extensively remodeled in the later sixth century BCE, at which time the well-known Temple of Menerva was erected (d'Aversa 1991: 45, 46). The sacred area is located near a regional locality known as Portonaccio, hence the common referral to the Portonaccio Temple of Veii. There, a sacred spring flowed just outside of the city wall.

The great pool associated with the temple was carefully built in ashlar blocks of tufa tightly fit together and then given a layer of impermeable clay on the outside to prevent leakage. It was able to hold 180 cubic meters of water that would have permitted total body immersions, if indeed this was part of the ritual associated with this sacred space. It was filled by a series of conduits running for more than 100 meters, connected with the sacred spring. The spring water itself is sulfurous and rich in iron; it is drinkable and was believed to contain therapeutic properties. A cistern (also lined with clay) and three wells were also uncovered in the sanctuary; these would have served the needs of the temple priests and worshippers who needed fresh water.

It appears that the complex terracotta decoration of the temple and its pool were also connected with oracular prophecies, healing, and purification rituals. Votive offerings found include images of Menerva, Athena Hygeia and Minerva Medica, suggesting that the water was consumed to restore or maintain health. The pool is paralleled in the Falerii temple of Lo Scasato (Carlucci and De Lucia 1998: 55; Harari 2010: 83–103). There, the cistern is sacred to Apollo Manticus, the prophetic Apollo, and associated with rituals involving an *haruspex* (priest diviner). At Veii, the spring carried such power that even after the Roman destruction of the city, it continued to be used into

in the second century CE.

Crater Lakes: Albano and Nemi

The Etruscan water-management abilities in the Archaic period may also be noted in their remarkable handling of the crater lakes of Albano and Nemi (Ward-Perkins and Boethius 1962: 1642–1643; Cascianelli 1991: 49–53). Beneath and around Lake Albano is a drainage tunnel 1200 meters long, while a tunnel at Lake Nemi may exceed 1600 meters. Each was designed to manage the lakes like a gigantic bathtub, with inserted overflow drains to take the excess water and channel it onto the territory nearby where it could be used for irrigation. As in the Roman forum area, this treatment reduced the possibility of flooding and protected nearby communities by insuring regulation of the volcanic basins. All of this was laid out with the use of a simple surveying instrument known as a *groma*.

Drainage Systems in Orvieto

A similar and noteworthy handling of drainage is also evident at Orvieto, ancient Velzna (Bizzarri 1998: 99; Bizzarri 2007: 317–350). In the Archaic period, apart from the precise grid that composes the Crocifisso del Tufo cemetery, there was also orthogonal planning reflected in the organization of water management for the town. The paucity of remains of the upper city do not allow for a complete reconstruction of its organizational layout, but remains of drainage channels under the city's streets and buildings indicate that the system was precise in its format. Since the upper city was probably extensively reorganized during the sixth century, this necessitated an extensive drainage system below, which dealt with the disposal of water overflow from cisterns in the atria of houses as well as from the houses' drains.

A complex underground infrastructure led to a series of channels disgorging water into main drains which deposited it outside the cliffs of Orvieto. Although localized changes in the gridded drain network would have resulted from topographical necessities within the hilltop, the overall regular pattern has been traced through the area of the ancient town. Additionally, a significant number of vertical shafts, probably from the sixth century BCE, were carefully dug into the rock, reaching down to the water table underneath the volcanic deposit. Cisterns were also built of tufa blocks with curved interiors, fitted together using a clay-rich mortar and surrounded by pure clay for impermeabilization.

For the inhabitants of ancient Orvieto the impressive number and size of

underground structures designed to preserve water were of crucial importance. In fact, due to the geological structure of the Orvieto mesa, there are no sources of water in the upper inhabited area; hence the incredible naturally fortified plateau was useless against a prolonged siege. Nonetheless, when the Romans besieged Velzna in 264 BCE, it took two years before the inhabitants were starved and had to surrender. This is because the main source of water came from vertical shafts and cisterns which the Romans were unable to suppress; the last cisterns were already improved with a thick layer of *cocciopesto*, a hydraulic mortar that the Romans themselves eventually used for their numerous water-related structures.

Chianciano Terme

An important site that affords a rare opportunity to view how Hellenistic Etruria interfaced with Roman technology is the locality of Mezzomiglio, in the heart of the town of Chianciano Terme, very close to Fucoli. Its Etruscan occupants had been aware of the medicinal values of their sacred spring from at least the second century BCE and probably from considerably earlier due to the presence of an enormous retaining wall of ashlar blocks which may be as early as the fourth or third century BCE. The Mezzomiglio sacred spring area reached its peak in a large complex constructed for visitors by the Roman emperor Trajan in approximately 114 CE, as the numerous stamped tiles used for both roofing and paving suggest. This site, developed fully after the region was under Roman control, nevertheless, represents a fascinating final phase in Etruscan architectural innovations and engineering and their legacy to Rome (Soren 2006, 2010).

The spa included a series of buildings gradually installed around a sacred spring that dispensed water with a high laxative value when imbibed. It remains the largest cold water spring ever found in Italy and, as such, is probably to be associated with the famed *fontes clusini* or the springs of Chiusi praised by Horace for curing the stomach woes of the emperor Augustus in 15 BCE, a feat so admired by the emperor that he made his own doctor, Antonius Musa, and all future Roman doctors exempt from taxes.

The divinity to whom the site's sacred spring was dedicated is not known. Nearby, at another thermal location dedicated to Sillene, offerings are believed to have been made to Artemis / Selene (Paolucci 1997: 19–20). As at Veii, a small though poorly preserved shrine is associated with the Mezzomiglio spring. It jutted out into a large colonnaded pool that was provided with a ramp at the southeast corner for unwell visitors to wade down into the sacred water and enjoy total body immersion. Another gradual ramp led out of the pool to the northeast. This *sacellum* was located exactly over the spot where the *sorgente* (spring water) entered the pool, which was

surrounded on all four sides by colonnades. The pool itself was only deep enough for one adult to stand up in, yet the complex measured c.18 meters per side and easily accommodated dozens of bathers at once, allowing each a wide area for total body immersion such as was described by Horace. The entries to the great pool were built up from rough-hewn stones, giving the effect that one was entering a magical cave or grotto, and then suddenly the vast pool and colonnade would appear. As visitors entered this “grotto,” they would have no doubt heard the sounds in the distance of bathers and the in-rushing and out-pouring spring water, all of which added to its dramatic effects and further enticed worshippers to go inside.

In a manner similar to the Etruscan harnessing of the volcanic lakes of Nemi and Albano, the huge pool functioned as a colossal bathtub, with a drain at the bottommost area of the pool, opposite the spring, which carried water off to the east through a large drainage channel and out of the site. If the spring entered the site with too much force, the overspill would be taken up in an overflow pipe 91 centimeters above the lower drain and linked to the drainage system. In this manner, a constant flow of spring water was assured, a constant water height for aged bathers was maintained, and drainage occurred in the manner utilized by the Etruscans since at least the Archaic period. Thus, at the Mezzomiglio spa, traditional Etruscan technology was readily on display well into the Roman era.

The site was rustic in the manner of numerous other Etruscan sites, with springs and sacred pools including, for example, Pasticcetto di Magione and Colle Arsiccio in the Perugia area (Gasperini 1988; Calapa 2006; Giontella 2011). But, instead of using concrete or mortar, which had already been developed and was in widespread use in Rome in the second and first centuries BCE, the Mezzomiglio architects confined the spring water by using the area’s natural kaolinitic clay. It is likely that the Etruscans selected the site not only for its spring but also because of its virgin soil. This clay could not only be used to create architecture but it appears to have been ritually important as well, imbued with curative powers (a view still supported by many contemporary inhabitants of the area). In spas throughout this region, even today, the clay is heated to about 45° centigrade and applied to the area of the human liver for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, intending to aid the biliary tract as part of a regimen of diet, exercise, and *fango* (mud) baths. Such therapeutic mud was also found in proximity to an Etruscan temple at Stigliano, 30 miles west of Rome (Gasperini 1988: 32), while Aelius Aristides, in his *Sacred Orations* 2 (24: 484–486), described in the second century CE the importance of healing mud used in conjunction with a sacred spring at Pergamon.

As an architectural binding agent, kaolinitic clay was used to treat the supporting walls for several phases of the colonnaded area around the sacred pool (Figure 10.2). Here, due to the volatile nature of the spring, frequent

subsidence and even sinkholes developed, requiring multiple phases of walling. In the earliest ones, an *opus incertum* arrangement of stones which resembles walling in Rome from the second century BCE appears, but with the local clay used instead of concrete as the setting for the stones. As more wall repairs were done, continuing into the first century BCE, the walls changed to *opus reticulatum cubilia* (pyramidal shaped stones of smaller size set in a diagonal, net-like arrangement) and, once again, kaolinitic clay served as the binding agent. In this way, the Etruscan architects demonstrate how they absorbed the latest in Roman technology for wall construction while still adapting it and creating their own style from it. As we have seen, this was a typical Etruscan response to outside stimuli from the earliest times of their architecture. Despite the fact that sophisticated advances in technology were increasingly common and visible in Rome, this large sanctuary remained conservative, with most buildings constructed as much as possible in the old ways and traditions, perhaps because of their ritual functions, until its demise in the third century CE. In the early second century CE one bath building at the site appears to have been built of typical Roman brickwork until one gets close to it and realizes the building has been faced with tabulate local stones chosen for their reddish hue which were cut to *resemble* Roman bricks.



Figure 10.2 Wall from the eastern perimeter of the great pool, second – first century BCE. From the locality of Mezzomiglio, Chianciano Terme.

Photo: courtesy Noelle Soren.

The excavations at Mezzomiglio also show that while the Etruscans were

hydrologically sophisticated, they did not keep pace with the Roman development of concrete and vaulting, and the laying of strong walls in *opus incertum* technique. The Etruscans of Mezzomiglio did not match Roman ingenuity in the evolution of architecture, but chose to fuse their traditional technology with the new influences to create a hybrid local architecture, even well into the Imperial period.

4. The Manufacturing of Architectural Elements

In surveying the innovations of Etruscan architecture, we cannot overlook the fact that the Etruscans were major processors of bronze and iron which were exported beyond Etruria throughout Italy and the entire Mediterranean. This was especially important for the manufacturing and distribution of architectural elements such as brackets and nails needed for the type of architecture in their cities and villages which was dependent upon timbers and wooden structures. These products required special *officinae* or workshops, elaborate organization to mine and refine the raw materials, and a sizeable work force. In the region of Piombino and Baratti in northwest Tuscany, at Populonia and Elba, the remains of one of the largest metal-gathering complexes in the entire ancient Mediterranean has been discovered (De Tommaso 2003; Cambi, Cavari, and Mascione 2009). Here one can visit open-cast mines where iron which lay close to the surface was extracted, from as early as the Villanovan period in the ninth and eighth century BCE, the earliest date from which remains of slag have been found on the beach.

5. Conclusions

This survey of some of the latest work in Etruscan architecture leads to a number of conclusions. The Etruscans were clearly not copiers or mere second-rate purveyors of Greek architecture. Rather, they were the most technically advanced local culture in the Italian peninsula in their era, developing a type of domestic dwelling (e.g., the *atrium tuscanicum*) that was not only well-suited to their climate and cultural traditions but also one of their most important legacies to Rome. Because of their water-rich landscape and their contacts with Greek and Near Eastern cultures, they also became superb at water management at a very early date. With it they made possible the drainage of the Roman forum, enabling the expansion of the city of Rome. Using their hydraulic technology, they built dams, irrigated agricultural areas, created *cuniculi*, developed sacred pools, and established associations between deities and natural springs. With waterproof clay abundantly available, moreover, there was no need to rely on mortars. Etruscan architects

continued to innovate even in their latest phases as they reacted to architectural and engineering developments in Roman Republican and even Imperial architecture. They syncretized or blended technology from other Mediterranean cultures and adapted it to their own specific ritual and physical requirements. Despite the lack of fine marble in their own region, they created monumental architecture using stone, timber and clay, thereby demonstrating a comparable level of technology with Greece. For these reasons, Etruscan architecture remains a fascinating study of innovation and imagination, a significant contribution not only to ancient technology as a whole but also to the Romans and all later occupants of the Italian peninsula.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

While the book on Etruscan technology and innovation has still to be written, there are a number of works which have begun to address the subject. A good deal of information is available from the study of the site reports indicated within this chapter, many of which attempt to extrapolate the microcosm of the individual site into a macrocosm of general trends across Etruria. One of the most insightful works to establish the innovativeness of the Etruscans in combining influences from the Greek and Near Eastern worlds with their own ritual needs is Hopkins's study (2010) of the Capitoline Temple in Rome which illustrates both the influences which impacted the construction of that temple and the enormous influence that the temple itself had on later Roman architecture through its commanding presence and its architectural uniqueness.

With regard to hydraulics and general water management, important studies by Bergamini (1991), Cascianelli (1991) and Bizzarri (2007) point out the close bond that the Etruscans had with water sources as a lifeblood for their crops, their religious needs in the form of ritual springs and pools and for the development of their cities in the form of wells and cisterns and extraordinarily elaborate drainage systems. These authors detail the kinds of innovations that resulted when the Etruscans took knowledge from the Greeks and adapted it to their own social and religious needs. The Etruscan influence in water management on the initial development of Rome has been detailed particularly in the seminal work by Ammerman (1990).

The evolution of the Villanovan house from a simple hut or series of huts into the Etruscan home is documented in Colantoni (2012) as well as in articles by

Donati (1994, 2000), which also discuss the emergence of the atrium house form. To these can be added Vincent Jolivet's exhaustively researched monograph (2011) on the indebtedness of the morphology of the "Roman" house to Etruscan influences. More information about later Etruscan housing will no doubt be forthcoming once the critical new excavations at Vetulonia are completed and published, offering the first opportunity to understand a late Etruscan complex with its original (non-perishable) internal contents preserved through fire. This critical site will also provide dramatic information about the survival of Etruscan life into the period of Roman conquest in the second century BCE.

One area of considerable interest which has only been summarily investigated is the point of Etruscan–Roman interface and how the Etruscans chose to adapt Roman techniques to their own needs. This includes the reaction of the Etruscans to the introduction of actual bricks as well as their adaptation of kaolinitic clay to meet the challenge of Roman concrete which was not widely used by them (even though at Orvieto a hard early mortar appears to have been pressed into use before the mid third century BCE). Another factor which may have inhibited the widespread development of new technology in Etruria was the apparent ritual need to continue "the old ways" even into Roman times, a topic discussed by Soren (2006, 2010).

CHAPTER 11

Rock Tombs and the World of the Etruscan *Necropoleis* *Recent Discoveries, Research, and Interpretations*

Stephan Steingraber

1. Introduction

Modern-day Tuscany and northern Latium are the homeland of Etruscan civilization, which developed during the first millennium BCE between Florence and Rome and between the Tyrrhenian sea and the Tiber river in the western part of central Italy (Torelli 1980; Steingraber 1981; Haynes 2000; Martinelli and Paolucci 2006). Today, these areas are full of ancient Etruscan cemeteries and tombs that have attracted the interest, fantasy, and greed of travelers, scholars, and tomb-robbers for centuries (Torelli 1982). These tombs, which date mainly from the seventh to the second century, are constructed with stone blocks or slabs (as mostly in northern Etruria) or hewn out from the soft volcanic tufa rock (as mostly in southern Etruria) as if for eternity.¹ As a consequence, they are much better preserved than the cities, villages, sanctuaries, temples, public buildings, houses, and huts of the Etruscans (Åkerström 1934; Demus Quatember 1958; Prayon 1975; Boethius 1978; Oleson 1982; Colonna 1986; Prayon 1986; Prayon 1989; Colonna 1994; Nardi 1999; Bartoloni 2000; Prayon 2000; Steingraber 2010; Bartoloni 2012a; Steingraber 2013). That we continue to know far more about the world of the dead in Etruria than we do that of the living is the result of several causes: cultural, religious, geological, and architectural, along with the history of research itself. Etruscan tombs are generally more massive and lasting in form than other building types, which were mostly constructed from more impermanent materials. Indeed, the Etruscans were conspicuous among ancient Mediterranean peoples for the labor and financial resources they were willing to invest in their cemeteries (necropoleis) and tombs; their tomb monuments, paintings, sculptures and reliefs; the rich burial gifts and cult ceremonies in honor of the dead and ancestors; and thus, so to speak, to the afterlife (Steingraber 1997, 2000a, and 2002; Steiner 2004; Prayon 2006).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, travelers, artists and scholars rediscovered, visited, described, drew and studied these unique Etruscan

cemeteries and tombs distributed all over central Italy and on the outskirts of Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Vulci, Vetulonia, Populonia, Volterra, Chiusi, and Orvieto (see [Map 1](#)). They remained fascinated by their splendidly elaborate architecture, their colorful and lively wall paintings, their luxurious and artistic burial gifts (as far as they were still preserved), and, especially, their harmony with the beautiful landscape and nature of Tuscany and northern Latium (Orioli 1826; Canina 1846–51; Origo Crea 1984). In 1848 the British diplomat, scholar and author George Dennis published his memorable and still-useful book on the *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*. His work is the product of his many visits to most of the Etruscan sites and reflects the importance and uniqueness of these tombs in the age of Romanticism (Dennis 1848).

Today, some Etruscan cemeteries and tombs are situated in archaeological parks, some are still located in the virgin wildness and nature of Etruria, and others are now used as stalls, storerooms and wine cellars. Every year new tombs are discovered by regular excavations (as well as by tomb robbers), contributing to a better understanding of the Etruscan world of the dead. In September of 2013, for example, an almost intact chamber tomb dating from the late Orientalizing period was discovered and opened in the Doganaccia locality close to the Tumulo della Regina at Tarquinia; it contained rich burial gifts that belonged to an aristocratic female (Mandolesi 2008). Many Etruscan cemeteries and tombs still await systematic study and publication, as is seen in the case of the large necropoleis of Cerveteri.

A visit to the Banditaccia Necropolis of Cisra/Caere/Cerveteri in Southern Etruria near the Tyrrhenian coast gives one the best sense of a large, monumental Etruscan cemetery dating from the ninth to the second centuries (Pallottino 1971; Drago Troccoli 2006). Such a visit also provides one with an idea of the great richness and power of the Etruscan metropolis of Cerveteri, particularly during the seventh and sixth centuries when it was in close cultural and economic contact with the Greek and Near Eastern world. These factors made it one of the most important cities of the Mediterranean. The necropolis was excavated and restored during the first decades of the twentieth century, mainly by R. Mengarelli, and is now situated in a beautiful archaeological park (Ricci 1955; Moretti 1977). It consists of thousands of tombs, mainly chambers hewn out from the reddish tufa rock and covered partly by huge and smaller tumuli (mounds) (seventh and early sixth century), or by rectangular cubes (from the middle of the sixth century) ([Figure 11.1](#), Plate Section). These funerary monuments are arranged in a system of burial roads and squares (sometimes one can see still the tracks of the burial cart wheels) representing thus a kind of “city of the dead” (from the Greek “necropolis”).



Figure 11.1 Tumulus tomb, seventh century. From the Banditaccia necropolis, Caere.

Photo: S. Steingraber.

There is a rich typological variety of tombs at Cerveteri, especially from the beginning of the seventh to the beginning of the fifth century. F. Prayon (1975) divided them into six main types (A–F). Several are also documented in other parts of southern Etruria too. Normally a *dromos* (corridor) leads down to the tomb that consists mostly of several rooms and includes many interesting architectural details. These details clearly imitate the (almost lost) Etruscan wooden house architecture (Naso 2001), such as doors and windows with frames, ledges, ceilings with beams, coffers and pediments, columns and pillars with decorated capitals, beds, thrones and chairs (e.g., the Tomb of Shields and Seats) (Steingraber 1979). Some of these architectural details are stuccoed and/or painted (e.g., the Tomb of the Painted Animals 1) (Naso 1991, 1995, 1996a). The dead were buried on the stone beds or in stone or wooden sarcophagi and surrounded by burial gifts, often very rich ones, such as furniture, vases, weapons, jewelry and other personal belongings in clay, terracotta, precious metals (bronze, silver, gold), ivory, wood, and textiles (especially in case of the leading aristocratic families which dominated Etruscan society). In this way, the tomb reflects the idea of a “house of the dead” from which the deceased would begin his or her last journey to the next world. The ramps and staircases in stone demonstrate that priests and family members could climb up onto the mounds and cubes for special ceremonies in honor of the dead ancestors (Prayon 1975; Zamarchi Grassi 1993; Steingraber

1997; Prayon 2006: 24–26); special tomb chambers with altars and sacrificial tables were also used for burial rites (e.g., the *Tomb of the Five Chairs* and the *Campana Tomb* 1) (Prayon 1975; 2006: 32–44). Walking on a hot summer day along the ancient burial roads between the impressive, monumental tumuli and the rows of cube-like tombs, now overgrown and surrounded by old trees and bushes, one feels closer to the Etruscans and can understand better their predilection for the ancestor cult and, moreover, the world of the dead.

2. The Rock Tombs of Southern Etruria

The so-called “rock tombs” in the southern Etruscan inland zone constitute an especially characteristic and impressive group for which there is no parallel in Italy in terms of quantity, monumentality, or variety of types (Colonna 1967). On the other hand, the phenomenon of rock tomb architecture was quite common in several other ancient cultures in the Mediterranean. Thus, while extraordinary within their Italian context, Etruscan rock tombs do not constitute a completely isolated case in antiquity (Steingraber 1996).

The geographical and geological situation, of course, is the fundamental precondition for the origin of rock tombs. Normally they occur in landscapes of volcanic origin with deep ravines and steep cliffs. The distribution of rock tombs in the central and eastern Mediterranean tells us that such conditions occur elsewhere outside of southern Etruria, namely in several regions of Asia Minor (Lycia, Caria and Paphlagonia), in the Palestinian and Nabatean regions, and in Cyrenaica. Rock tombs were also hewn out in Eastern Anatolian Urartu, in the Kurdish border area between Iran and Iraq, in the surroundings of Persian Persepolis, in the Saudi Arabian Hegra and in Egyptian Beni Hassan. A characteristic rock architecture can also be found in areas with cultures completely different from the Etruscans, such as in Afghanistan, India, and China, but normally those monuments belong to sacral rather than sepulchral architecture.

The chronological range of these kinds of tombs in the Mediterranean extends from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (Dynasty XII in Beni Hassan) to the Roman Imperial period. Before the sixth century only relatively few examples (e.g., in Urartu and Phrygia) can be found. During the fourth century the phenomenon increased markedly and then reached its high point in the Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial periods (Steingraber 1996).

In their typology, size, equipment, and decoration, rock tombs demonstrate a wide spectrum of characteristics. On the other hand, we also encounter several characteristics that are common to different regions. This phenomenon was particularly marked in the so-called “peripheral” cultures, which often, in a

relatively short period, had a strong economic upturn and became very rich, mostly as the result of trade. A. Schmidt-Colinet formulated this fact succinctly about Nabatean rock tomb architecture, about which he writes that: “one can perceive, behind all these cities of the dead in the rock effort to grant to the houses of the dead, quite clearly in contrast to the houses of the living – as far as we can understand these things at all archaeologically – permanence and monumentality” (Schmidt-Colinet 1980: 229 especially).

In general one can say that the main emphasis in rock tomb architecture was laid on the outward appearance, i.e. on the monument and not so much on the tomb chamber or the deathbed or the burial gifts. Obviously the owners of these tombs wanted to be noticed by their contemporaries and descendants. Therefore the “ideology” of most of these monuments expresses not only material prosperity and need for admiration, but also a particular social pretension.

The Etruscan rock tombs are concentrated in the southern Etruscan interior (Colonna di Paolo 1978; Steingraber 1985; Romanelli 1986; Moscatelli and Mazzuoli 2008; Steingraber 2009a). This landscape of pastoral character is still quite intact and is especially distinctive for its volcanic tufa stone, its deep canyon-like valleys, its plateaux with naturally defended settlements, and its several crater lakes. The distribution of rock tombs extends from the edges of the eastern Tofa around Stigliano in the south to southwestern Tuscany around Sovana in the north, with the main centers in Blera (Koch, von Mercklin, and Weickert 1915; Quilici Gigli 1976), San Giuliano (Gargana 1931; Steingraber 2009b), Tuscania (Quilici Gigli 1970; Steingraber 1996: 84–91), Norchia (Colonna di Paolo and Colonna 1978), Castel d’Asso (Colonna di Paolo and Colonna 1970), and Sovana (Maggiani 1994; Barbieri 2010).

The beginnings of southern Etruscan rock tomb architecture go back to the second quarter of the sixth century. The most recent examples date from the late third and early second century. This phenomenon had its high point in the later Archaic period (second half of the sixth century and beginning of the fifth century) and in the early Hellenistic period (end of the fourth and first half of the third century). During the first period of its efflorescence, the most numerous and complex rock tombs were situated largely in the south around Blera (Figure 11.2) and San Giuliano (an area that belongs to the sphere of political and cultural influence of Cerveteri) and Tuscania (which is in the hinterland of Tarquinia). The most important rock tombs of the second high period are more to be found in the north, at Norchia, Castel d’Asso, and Sovana (i.e., in the areas of influence, respectively, of Tarquinia and Vulci). During the Etruscan Classical period, the phenomenon of rock tombs was less important. This shift probably resulted from, on the one hand, an evident economic crisis in this area and, on the other, a stronger social leveling of the population structure.



Figure 11.2 Rock-cut cube tomb, sixth century. From the Casetta necropolis, Blera.

Photo: S. Steingraber.

Agriculture, primarily the production of wine, olive oil, and grain was certainly the main economic basis of the southern Etruscan rock tomb area, but also domestic trade and, in part, the utilization of the nearby metal deposits could have contributed to the region's prosperity. In addition, during the Romanization of Etruria, Roman political forces supported the smaller inland centers at the expense of the larger coastal centers (see [Chapter 3](#)). This fact is reflected also in the building of the Via Clodia. From after the middle of the second century, a general decline in southern Etruria is undeniable.

One can divide the research on southern Etruscan rock tombs into three main periods. The Englishmen Samuel James Ainsley and George Dennis are to be regarded as the real discoverers of these tombs in the middle of the nineteenth century (Dennis 1848; Origo Crea 1984). The Italians L. Canina (Canina 1846–51) and F. Orioli (Orioli 1826) and the Frenchmen H. Labrousse and A. Lenoir rendered outstanding service, mostly for their illustrations of these monuments. In the period between the First and Second World Wars, intensive excavations and research activities were carried out by the Germans H. Koch, E. von Mercklin, and C. Weickert in Blera (Koch et al. 1915), and by the Italians R. Bianchi Bandinelli in Sovana (Bianchi Bandinelli 1929), A. Gargana in San Giuliano (Gargana 1931), and G. Rosi on southern Etruscan rock tomb architecture generally (Rosi 1925, 1927). Only during the 1960s

did a third period of lively research activity start again, represented mainly by the Swedish excavations under King Gustav VI Adolf at San Giovenale and Luni sul Mignone (Boethius 1962), by the Etruscologist couple E. and G. Colonna at Castel d'Asso and Norchia (Colonna di Paolo and Colonna 1970, 1978), by S. Quilici on the topography of Blera and Tuscania (Quilici Gigli 1970, 1976), by A. Maggiani at Sovana (Maggiani 1994), by J.P. Oleson in a fundamental study on late southern Etruscan rock tomb architecture (Oleson 1982), and finally by R. Romanelli in a general study of the southern Etruscan rock tomb area (Romanelli 1986). The systematic series of publications of all relevant Etruscan rock tomb necropoleis initiated and edited by the Consiglio Nazionale di Ricerche (CNR) in Rome unfortunately came to a standstill several years ago. The most recent discoveries in Tuscania, in particular, make perfectly clear to scholars the necessity for the continuation of these publications and for an intensive analysis of this unique phenomenon (Steingraber 2012: 90–92). In October 2010, S. Steingraber and F. Ceci organized an international Congress on the southern Etruscan rock tomb area at Barbarano Romano and Blera (Steingraber and Ceci 2014). This important event and other recent publications have helped greatly to revive interest in and stimulate research on Etruscan rock necropoleis and tombs.

Types and Variants of Southern Etruscan Rock Tombs

One can divide southern Etruscan rock tombs into several types and variants according to geographic distribution, chronology, and size. The spectrum ranges from simple chambers, loculi, or niches cut into the tufa rock without elaborated façades to complex, temple-shaped rock monuments. The so-called “cube tomb” (*tomba a dado*) is the most common type from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods. Among the other types to be mentioned are the house tomb (sixth to third centuries with the best examples appearing in Tuscania and Blera), the Archaic porticus tomb (second half of the sixth century; only in San Giuliano), the Hellenistic temple- and porticus tomb (Norchia, Sovana), the Hellenistic aedícula tomb and the Hellenistic tholos tomb (both in Sovana).

It is characteristic of the development of Etruscan rock tomb architecture that, in the course of time, the façade gained in importance as a tomb monument at the expense of the tomb chamber or burial, which since the fourth century was transferred to beneath the façade and was less precisely articulated. The tomb façades – or their details, at least – were originally painted (Figure 11.3), while inscriptions and reliefs are relatively rare. One of the most characteristic elements, especially of the cube tombs, is the so-called *porta dorica*, which in the older period still forms the real entrance to the tomb chamber. During the

fourth century, it becomes a mere false door, probably assuming symbolic significance (see further, [Chapter 17](#)).



Figure 11.3 Reconstruction of the façade of the Hildebrand temple tomb at Sovana, first half of the third century BCE. Archaeological Museum of Sovana.

Photo: S. Steingraber.

Some elements of rock tombs, such as the platforms with moldings and the lateral stairs on cube tombs, clearly only served ceremonies associated with the cult of the dead. These platforms are formally and functionally comparable to monumental altars and could serve also as supports for cippi of different forms and sizes. The so-called *sottofacciata* rooms, with stone benches partly in front of the façades, of Hellenistic cube tombs in Norchia and Castel d'Asso, were probably intended for funeral banquets (Steingraber 1997; Prayon 2006: 24–26).

Normally the rock tombs were carved out of the tufa faces, starting at the top. Sometimes individual structures were also built of stone blocks (e.g., see the Archaic porticus tomb in Tuscania-Pian di Mola: Steingraber 1996: 84–91). Fixed measurements were apparently not used. During the most flourishing periods of rock tomb architecture, we have to postulate a large number of simple stonemasons, and also specialized sculptors who articulated the details, most likely with reference to models or graphic drawings.

Among the different tomb types and their decoration, we can detect both local

Etruscan and foreign innovative elements. The cube tomb, with its several variants, is a characteristic Etruscan type. On the other hand, the monumental and expensive temple- and porticus tombs of the Hellenistic period are inconceivable without foreign models and influences. In their general conception, these tombs remind us primarily of the mausoleum and heroon traditions in Asia Minor (e.g., see the Mausolea of Halikarnassos and Belevi and the Archokrateion of Rhodos discussed by J.P. Oleson (1982: 49–61, 63–71, 88–96) and J. Fedak (1990: 65–101, 295–331), whereas with regard to the details of the decoration and reliefs we can ascertain prototypes especially from Southern Italy and Apulia.

Topographical arrangement and organization of the larger rock tomb necropoleis are not accidental but an expression of an intended rational use of space and of new urbanistic tendencies. The rock tombs often are arranged in rows side by side and on terraces on top of each other, connected by paths and stairs. They concentrate particularly on the areas along the main entry and exit roads of the ancient city, or are situated around rectangular squares. Similar tendencies are reflected in the rectangular system of cube tomb streets in the necropoleis of Cerveteri (Banditaccia) and Orvieto (Crocifisso del Tufo), which date from the second half of the sixth century, and in the “Hippodamian” town system of Marzabotto (and most recently documented for the late Archaic period in Prato-Gonfienti too), which dates to around 500 (Steingraber 2001: especially 14–19).

Only a certain number of types, ground plans, and details of rock tombs are borrowed from Etruscan house architecture: e.g., the house-shaped type, the ground plan of the transverse house with two or three rooms side by side (= tomb types D and E in Cerveteri according to Prayon 1975), or individual elements, such as the saddle roof or beds (*klinai*). Generally the discrepancy between tomb and house architecture becomes still more obvious in the later rock tombs of the Hellenistic period.

From the beginning, the phenomenon of southern Etruscan rock tomb architecture certainly was not only determined by geological factors but also was aimed at scenographic and prestigious effects. This fact is reflected not least by the typical orientation of the tomb façades toward the city so as to establish a permanent visual link between the area of the living and the area of the dead. Already at the beginning of rock tomb architecture, the façade was especially emphasized but the relation between the external architecture and the tomb chamber was still appropriate and functional. However, from the fourth century on this relationship utterly changed in favor of a pure and often very expensive false façade architecture, which neglected the subterranean, relatively disguised tomb chamber. This emphasis on the tomb monument and its exterior appearance doubtlessly expresses the intention of the social ruling classes – a kind of landed gentry – to stand out in public and permanently to recall themselves to the minds of their descendants.

The numerous burials – in the latest period, up to 70 per tomb – and burial gifts dating from several generations prove that most of these rock tombs constitute family complexes used for several generations. Of course, only exceptionally do we find tomb inventories still intact; this makes the dating of many tombs more difficult.

3. Case Study: The Rock Tombs at Pian di Mola in Tuscania

The origin of Archaic Etruscan rock tomb architecture in Etruria remains unclear in all its respects and is still disputed amongst scholars. Of particular interest in this regard is a large rock tomb area on the western slope of Pian di Mola in Tuscania ([Figure 11.4](#)). It was excavated by the Soprintendenza of Southern Etruria from 1984 to 1989, and more recently partly restored (Sgubini Moretti 1991: 14–24; Steingräber 1996: 84–91 and 2012: 90–92). This area contains several rock tombs situated along a funeral road and oriented toward the Peschiera necropolis, on the opposite side, and toward part of the ancient city.



Figure 11.4 Rock-cut house tomb with portico, 575–550 BCE. From the Pian di Mola necropolis, Tuscania.

Photo: S. Steingräber.

In the center of the area, there is a large house tomb carved almost entirely into the tufa, both front and rear. The portico in front is mostly constructed from blocks and slabs of tufa and peperino in different colors with chromatic effects. The quality of the stone masonry is excellent. The house tomb is 9.4 meters in length and 8.5 meters in depth. On and also partly beside the column of the roof, which is decorated with two lateral pediments, there were five rectangular bases, several house- and omphalos-shaped cippi, and a number of sculptures, among which two sphinxes and a lion are still preserved. The pediments are characterized by the molded ends of the longitudinal beams, a central vertical pillar, and a molded architrave. Both ends of the column are decorated with disk-shaped acroteria, which were originally painted. The tomb façade stands out due to the central entrance door and two lateral false doors (subdivided into four panels, all in the *porta dorica* type), a profiled base, and a profiled upper zone with “owl’s beak” (*becco di civetta*), fasciae and torus. The central entrance originally was closed by stone blocks, which also imitate the structure of a paneled door. The portico consists of two antae with profiled bases and four Tuscan columns, among which we can still see the bases with their rich moldings. An entablature of Ionian type, which probably carried a flat roof with imitation of wooden beams on the underside, had an incline in front. Small sculptures of reclining lions were probably arranged on top of the entablature of the portico. A staircase on the left led to the portico roof, which doubtlessly served as a platform for cult ceremonies (as did the platforms on top of many rock cube tombs). Inside the house cube we find three chambers arranged side by side with ground plans that are not perfectly rectangular. The central chamber is characterized by a horizontal ceiling with beams and, in front of the rear wall, a bed (*kline*) with turned legs and two heads. The side chambers have three rather simple stone beds and a ceiling with a small angle of inclination. Fragments of Etruscan and Greek ceramics and faience, and a bronze lion statuette (from a cauldron) found in the tomb testify that its use dates from the second quarter until the end of the sixth century; that is, for about three generations.

North of this tomb and especially to the south we find several simpler house and cube tombs without any porticus. They can be dated to the second and third quarters of the sixth century due to fragmentary burial gifts. A little older than the main tomb is a small *pozzo* or well tomb in which an Attic krater functioned as an urn. This tomb was topped by a well-articulated house-shaped cippus with disk-shaped acroteria and traces of paint. This kind of cippus reflects the form of the house tombs in miniature.

The house tomb with porticus at Pian di Mola and the annexed group of monumental rock tombs doubtlessly belonged to one of the aristocratic clans that dominated Tuscania politically and economically in the Archaic period. Unfortunately, we do not know the name of this family but probably there was

intended a precise genealogical and “ideological” relationship between, on the one side, the cremation burial in the (not much older) *pozzo* tomb, containing the Attic krater and the house-shaped cippus, and on the other, the main inhumation burial in the house tomb with porticus. Even at this early point we can ascertain an intended demonstration of social status in the tomb architecture of the southern Etruscan inland because greater emphasis was placed on the façades than on the interiors of the tombs there. This tendency will increase significantly in later periods.

The porticus tomb in Tuscania generally belongs to among the oldest rock tombs in the Mediterranean area, even though it is not a pure rock tomb with regard to its structure. Older rock tombs or rock monuments, for example those in Urartu and Phrygia, cannot be considered prototypes for typological reasons. The oldest carved porticus tombs outside Etruria, such as those in Persia, Cyrenaica (Barka) and Paphlagonia, have to be dated at least several decades later. Definitely later, too, are the oldest house tombs of Lycia, which also are not comparable in typological respects to the Etruscan examples. Still later are the Lycian and Carian temple tombs (Steingraber 1996: 75–76, 90). Therefore we have to assume that our monumental rock tomb in Tuscania was influenced mainly by the architecture of the Etruscan house and palace and not by that of the temple nor by foreign tombs.

On the other hand, we must also question whether the phenomenon of rock tombs, which had been deeply rooted in some parts of Asia Minor since early periods, could not have given some impulse to the genesis of Etruscan rock tomb architecture – not so much in specific typology but in a more general conceptual way. It could also speak well for this hypothesis that the oldest Etruscan rock tombs of the second quarter of the sixth century were not the result of a long local development but appeared suddenly, completely developed and monumentalized. There were manifold relations between the coastal centers of Etruria and several regions of Eastern Greece and Asia Minor as early as the eighth and especially in the seventh century. From this point of view, we have to see possible influences from Asia Minor in the architecture of the monumental tumuli that started quite suddenly during the first decades of the seventh century, particularly in Cerveteri. Both F. Prayon (1995) and A. Naso (1996b, 1998) have drawn our attention to this fact by reminding us, for example, of the big Lydian tumuli with partly carved chamber tombs and interior painted decoration. As has been clearly proved, eastern influence, especially from northern Syria, was decisive for the monumentalization of Etruscan funerary sculpture in the early seventh century. G. Colonna and F. W. von Hase (1984) illustrated this very well in the *Tomb of the Statues* at Ceri, which dates from the first quarter of the seventh century BCE.

4. Hellenistic Period Barrel-Vaulted Tombs in Etruria

Concerning the late Etruscan period (the end of the fourth to the second century BCE) the barrel-vaulted (or so-called Macedonian) type is of particular interest. We find the oldest examples of the early Hellenistic period in South Etruria (Cerveteri and Orvieto), whereas the more recent and numerous examples of the middle Hellenistic period are located in central and northeastern Etruria (the areas of Chiusi, Cortona and Perugia) (Oleson 1982: 30–39, 71–88, 97–106; Steingräber 1993: 180–182; Benassai 2011).

Doubtlessly we have to deal here with an innovative tomb type of foreign origin. The tombs are mostly built in stone blocks – only the *Tassinaiia Tomb* at Chiusi is hewn out of the soft local sandstone – and are characterized by a rectangular ground plan, a ledge, benches and/or niches and the barrel vault built precisely in single stones without any mortar. The vault of the so-called *Tanella di Pitagora* at Cortona (Figure 11.5) is erected in huge monolithic blocks in the longitudinal axis. The *Ipogeo di San Manno* near Perugia has two small barrel-vaulted side chambers too. The oldest and most impressive example, the *Tomb of the Demons*, is located in *Grotte Sant'Angelo* at Cerveteri and characterized by a large open space, a facade with sculptural decorations (including a figure of the demon Charun) and a huge chamber with a double barrel vault in single stone blocks and plastered walls. It can be dated still toward the end of the fourth century and is clearly influenced by Macedonian models of the second half of the fourth century. Those influences were probably transmitted by northern Apulia/Daunia and Campania to southern Etruria and later northwards. In Daunia we find monumental barrel-vaulted tombs mainly in Arpi near Foggia – the most important example is the *Ipogeo della Medusa* (Figure 11.6) – in Campania in Naples (*Ipogeo Cristallini*, *Ipogeo Santa Maria La Nova*), Capua, Cuma, Teano, Cales and Atripalda (Mazzei 1995; Steingräber 2000b: 1–60, 114). In the early Hellenistic period the new leading Mediterranean power that was Macedonia attracted the leading aristocratic classes both in southern Italy and in Etruria in ideological and cultural sense and so Macedonian models became reflected in the palace and house architecture as in tomb architecture in Italy too.



Figure 11.5 Barrel vault from the so-called *Tanella di Pitagora*, third – second century BCE. Stone. From Cortona.

Photo: S. Steingraber.



Figure 11.6 Barrel vault in the Tomb of the Medusa, third century BCE.

Stone. From Arpi (near Foggia in Apulia).

Photo: S. Steingraber.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter, it has been possible only to touch upon and discuss a small selection of Etruscan necropoleis and tombs – mainly those of Cerveteri, the volcanic inland area of southern Etruria, and the special group of the barrel-vaulted tombs from the Hellenistic period. There are, of course, many different approaches to this extremely complex and interesting topic which often reflect historic, economic and social changes as well. As demonstrated by numerous publications over the last decades, these include emphases on technical–architectural aspects, art history, religion, social concerns, to name just a few. Of special interest are also the history of discoveries and research; the organization and topography of the necropoleis; the influences from house, palace and temple architecture; the distinction between local Etruscan and imported foreign elements; the elements for the ancestor cult; the funeral inscriptions, cippi (Steingraber 1991) and tomb sculptures and the composition and character of the burial gifts. The main desiderata for future studies should be greater international cooperation; the creation of valid and helpful databases; the still-missing comprehensive publication of several important necropoleis; more paleoanthropological, paleozoological, and paleobotanical research for the reconstruction of general living conditions in Etruria (Becker, Turfa, and Algee-Hewitt 2009); and, finally, the preparation and publication of a well-organized handbook/manual on all Etruscan necropoleis, tombs and tomb architecture, including the most recent excavations, discoveries and interpretations.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Special articles on Etruscan necropoleis, tombs, and tomb architecture can be found in journals such as *Studi Etruschi*, *Notizie degli Scavi* and *Etruscan Studies*. Important “handbooks” of a more general and partly topographic character were published by Dennis 1848, Åkerström 1934, Prayon 1975, Boethius 1978, Steingräber 1981, Oleson 1982, and Haynes 2000. Short summaries we owe mainly to Bartoloni 2000 and 2012a; Colonna 1986 and 1994; Prayon 1986, 1989, and 2000; Steingräber 2010; and Torelli 1982. For a more social-historical approach see Bartoloni 2003, Naso 2007, Izzet 2007, and especially Riva 2010. For the important aspect of ancestral cult and Etruscan afterlife see Prayon 2006 and Steiner 2004. The best summary on the necropoleis of Cerveteri is published by Drago Troccoli 2006. For the Etruscan rock tombs and rock monuments see mainly Colonna di Paolo 1978, Romanelli 1986, Steingräber 1996 and 2009a, and Steingräber and Prayon 2011. The most recent publication on the barrel-vaulted tombs in Etruria and Southern Italy we owe to Benassai 2011. For the necropoleis of Cerveteri see Pohl 1972 and Ricci 1955; Chiusi: Bianchi Bandinelli 1925; Orvieto: Bonamici, Stopponi and Tamburini 1994; Perugia: Nati 2008; Poggio Buco: Bartoloni 1972 and Pellegrini 1989; Pontecagnano: D'Agostino 1977; Populonia: Minto 1922, Romualdi 1992 and Zifferero 2000; Saturnia: Donati 1989; Tarquinia: Pallottino 1937; Vetulonia: Falchi 1891; and Vulci:

Messerschmidt and von Gerkan 1930. For famous single tombs or tomb monuments in Etruria see Blanck and Proietti 1986, Camporeale 1968, Cristofani 1965 and 1969; Gaugler 2002, Nicosia 1966 and Pareti 1947.

NOTE

¹ All dates in this chapter are BCE.

CHAPTER 12

Communicating with Gods

Sacred Space in Etruria

P. Gregory Warden

1. Introduction: Ritual, Religion, and Space

Etruscan religiosity is by now a commonplace, and often cited is the authority of Livy attesting that the Etruscans were more dedicated to religion than anyone else in the ancient Mediterranean, and especially its practice: “... a people more than any other dedicated to religion, the more as they excelled in practicing it” (*gens itaque inte omnes alias eo magis dedita religionibus quod excelleret arte colendi eas*: *History of Rome* 5.1.6). The distinction between belief and practice is important. Livy suggests that what is notable about the Etruscans is not just that they were religious – in this they might not have been more exceptional than many other peoples – but that they excelled in its practice: what we would call ritual, the art or craft of religion. This notable predilection for ritual is mirrored much later in a Christian setting by Arnobius, who connects ritual, and presumably the vile doctrines that lay behind it, as superstition: “... the birthgiver and mother of superstitions” (*genetrix et mater superstitionis Etruria*: *Against the Pagans* 7.26). A picture emerges of a society ruled by theocratic elites who held power through ritual that was deeply embedded in the social landscape. Specifics of Etruscan ritual, especially as connected to divination, are to be found more broadly in Cicero and Pliny, and the Etruscan *disciplina* is broadly attested. Actual details, however, especially as they relate to Etruscans concepts of the divine ordering of space, the “reading” of that space, and thus the understanding of divine will by Etruscan elites, are, unfortunately, more explicitly described only in later sources.

The Etruscan interest in the interpretation of natural phenomena as divine portents is also well-attested in literary sources, and the fundamental difference of the Etruscan view of these signs was beautifully summarized by Seneca in his sympathetic treatise on the meaning of the natural divine: the difference between Romans and Etruscans is that they attribute everything to the agency of the gods, so that signs do not reveal the future simply because they have happened, but that signs have happened because they explicitly reveal the future (*Natural Questions* 2.32.2). As has been often pointed out, while we know too little about the Etruscans, we know much more about their

religion, in no small part because their belief system profoundly influenced the Romans and thus is part of the historical record. This picture is supplemented and increasingly altered by modern archaeology, where material culture provides a kind of “ground truthing” (Turfa 2011) to the textual record. The combination of literary sources and archaeological evidence now allows for a broader picture of Etruscan religion. The material culture provides in some ways a finer lens through which to view and reconstruct ritual: for if ritual is the “art” or practice of religion, the physical manifestation through bodily/performative action of the broader belief system, then the material remains—be they bones, bronze, or clay—are the actual testament of those ritual actions (see further, [Chapter 18](#)). But Seneca’s reference to Etruscan belief is important; the point of Etruscan religion is the interpretation of divine will, and that interpretation is undertaken through ritual action that is performative. Ritual thus embodies belief, and the distinction between belief and ritual action becomes significant. The tendency for modern interpreters to separate belief from ritual – to consider the latter to be superstition, or at least a more virulent form of superstition than pure belief – creates an artificial distinction that probably would have been alien to the Etruscans. The intersection of belief and ritual as evidenced by the archaeological record provides insight into what would have been a continuum, the full spectrum of Etruscan religiosity that was the force shaping the social landscape.

The physical landscape of religious observance is also fundamental for understanding the Etruscans, for ritual is also an act of communication that connected humans with divinity. Although we may not know the details of all Etruscan religious observance, we do have good knowledge of Etruscan sacred spaces, the physical locus of their religiosity.

2. Sacred Space: Sanctuary, Altar, and Temple

It is the nature of archaeology to define through typology, and the study of sacred space is often divided into separate categories, such as sanctuary, altar, and temple. This approach may work better for other cultures. But in the case of the Etruscans, where we are already faced with a bewildering variety of regional approaches and the great changes that took place over almost a millennium of history, the primacy of ritual most likely superseded all other determinants. Etruscan religion in its earliest form was probably animistic, and the sacredness of place in many documented instances was connected to natural phenomena: examples include springs and other water sources (e.g., the sanctuary at the headwaters of the Arno ([Figure 12.1](#), Plate Section) on Monte Falterona (Fortuna and Giovanotti 1975; 1989)), underground fissures and other notable environmental features, or even something as simple as a

place that was struck by lightning. Or a particular combination of environmental features may have created sacredness, as, for instance, at the sanctuary of Fontanile di Legnisina near Vulci, where a water source, dramatic rock formations, and proximity to a road and a nearby settlement may have all figured in the prominence of the site (Massabò 1992: 104). We will probably never know how or why certain spaces came to be considered sacred, but the Etruscan interest in sacred space was connected to two fundamental characteristics of their belief system: the observance of natural phenomena that implicated divine order, and the interest in defining space and boundaries that once again reflected a human interpretation of divine order (Edlund-Berry 2011: 116–131). The end result of these beliefs is variability: sacred space in Etruria seems to find different arrangements in almost every case (Edlund 1987), with no rules that we can divine for its layout beyond the nature of the place and the topography of rituals performed.



Figure 12.1 The Lake of the Idols in the sanctuary at the headwaters of the Arno River on Monte Falterona.

Photo: P.G. Warden.

Sometimes, sanctuaries were part of a greater fabric, such as a city or even a necropolis (Steingraber and Menichelli 2010), as is the case of the famous Cannicella shrine at Orvieto (Della Fina 1987). In this instance, the sacred area is situated within a larger necropolis. There probably would have been a *sacellum* or roofed area that held the famous Cannicella nude, a female statue that may have been retrofitted from a Greek marble kouros. Surrounding areas have channels that are probably connected to sacrificial rituals, and the purpose of the area seems to have been to connect the living, through ritual, to

the gods of the underworld below. The Cannicella sanctuary is a particularly elaborate example of what must have been commonplace: sacred areas near tombs that were connected to the veneration of family members or ancestors who may have even been considered divine (Damgaard Andersen 1993; Camporeale 2009; Warden 2009a). The simplest ones might have been just a flat area paved with stone, or a niche in the side of a tumulus or chamber tomb. We know little about the more ephemeral types because excavation of funerary areas has not often focused on this kind of space, but more complex examples, such as the funerary altar attached to the Tumulo del Sodo II in Cortona (Zamarchi Grassi 1992; Bruschetti and Zamarchi Grassi 1994), not only reveal that this kind of worship was important but also that the tomb itself can be considered a kind of altar (Prayon 2010). The Cortona altar (Figure 12.2) is connected to the space around the tomb through a steep set of steps attached to the actual mound of the tumulus. The symbolism seems clear: the connection of the lower human space to the higher divine space is symbolized by an artificial mountain. In this case, the mountain becomes a kind of temple, and the steep steps of the altar do not invite participants in the ritual to climb up to the platform. We might more likely imagine a priest, probably a descendant of the individual heroicized by this kind of monument, officiating and, through ritual, connecting the attendants below with the mountain and the sky. This kind of “stairway to heaven” is sometimes implied by the actual corbelled structure of Etruscan tombs, by the corbelled or stepped “arches” over the doorways of tombs, or by the altars depicted in pediments in many Etruscan tombs. In the case of the Cortona altar, the symbolism is further elaborated through the massive sculptures that decorate its *antae*. These show a male figure being engulfed in the maw of a lion while he drives a dagger into the side of the predator – a scene of blood-letting and predation that may be linked to Etruscan concepts of transformation and deification (Warden 2009a).



Figure 12.2 Funerary altar attached to the *Tumulo del Sodo II*, seventh century BCE. From Cortona.

Photo: P.G. Warden.

The tumulus itself might have functioned as a sanctuary or sacred area. An example excavated near Pisa was topped by a stone altar with an iron sacrificial knife placed next to it, as well as a stone imitation of a ship's tiller (Bruni 1998; Floriani and Bruni 2006). The tomb chamber below was empty. The lack of burial and the tiller suggests a cenotaph, a memorial to an Etruscan aristocrat lost at sea. That the tumulus and the area around it

functioned as a virtual altar and sanctuary to the memory of an illustrious ancestor is further suggested by the anthropomorphic stelae placed around the tomb, silent witnesses and celebrants of an eternal funerary ritual.

Sanctuaries might be bounded and defined spaces, but they also could define greater spaces. Sanctuaries could delineate territory, marking natural or even political boundaries, a type that Zifferero (1995) defined as a *santuario di confine* (e.g., one whose placement defined ethnic, political, religious, or economic boundaries). In addition, cities themselves could be considered sacred spaces, defined and articulated in some of the same ways as sanctuaries (Briquel 2008). Thus, sanctuaries in Etruria could be well-defined places that functioned as more than a place of worship, with the larger ones, in particular, functioning as important economic engines that served as centers of production, repositories of wealth, and places for elite display (Becker 2009; a useful list of the many Etruscan sanctuaries and ritual settings known to date is provided by Collins-Elliott and Edlund-Berry 2011). In the case of the *Fanum Voltumnae*, the sanctuary could serve as a pan-Etruscan locus that formalized political as well as religious rituals that helped define a collective ethnic identity. The *Fanum Voltumnae* has been tentatively identified with the recently excavated sanctuary at the Campo della Fiera in Orvieto (Stopponi 2011). Sanctuaries could thus have important political significance, as is also the case at Pyrgi, which seems to have functioned as a nexus for Phoenician and Etruscan interaction (Baglione and Belevi Marchesini 2013). Another instance of a sanctuary that had a kind of ethnic identity of its own is the sanctuary at Graviscae, clearly founded and frequented by Greeks from the *emporion* at the same site, and dedicated to Aphrodite and Adonis (Fiorini and Torelli 2010). This sanctuary not only served the non-Etruscan population of a Greek trading center but it also had economic impact through the extensive metalworking that took place on site (Fiorini and Torelli 2010: 31).

But a sacred space might also be a simpler setting, a place for a single shrine or altar. And if sanctuaries could vary tremendously in size, form, layout and intent, then the altars themselves were so varied in type – there was probably no such thing as a canonical altar in Etruria – as to render attempts at classification extremely difficult (good comprehensive summaries, nevertheless, are available: Colonna 2006; Collins-Elliott and Edlund-Berry 2011). Altars could range from a simple pile of stone and ash to more monumental structures that resemble types from other parts of the ancient Mediterranean (e.g., the stone structures with U-shaped plans articulated in front by podiums with prominent moldings, *antae* and steps). Notable examples of the latter type include the acropolis altar at Marzabotto, the beautifully preserved altar at Pieve Socana (Figure 12.3), or, in the funerary sphere, the altar attached to the Tumulo del Sodo II at Cortona (see above). These more monumental structures were presumably places for the placement of sacrificial fires, places where larger-scale animal sacrifices could have

taken place, and in some cases these altars might have been associated with temples. But the axial association of altar and temple, well-documented in both Greece and Rome, was not as prevalent in Etruria. A case in point is Pyrgi, where the two sacred areas excavated so far are very different in plan (Boëthius 1970: 41, fig. 28). The northern area is monumental and axially arranged, while the southern area is laid out according to topographical and ritual exigencies, as has been recently demonstrated by Baglione and Betelli Marchesini (2013: 113–122), who discuss a mesmerizing variety of altars that are extremely varied in shape and type. The variety of forms at Pyrgi brings out the difficulty of defining or identifying altars that could serve different ritual purposes, from animal sacrifice or the dedication of objects, to the demarcation of space, or even to signal the placement of a votive deposit.



Figure 12.3 Monumental altar. From Pieve Socana.

Photo: P.G. Warden.

A similar variation can be seen with respect to Etruscan temples. The many varieties, especially of the Tuscan temple, are by now well-studied (Colonna 1985; Izzet 2000; Warden 2012). By the sixth century BCE, the layout of temples becomes more standard, perhaps due to influence from Greece, and two types are found: the Greek peripteral temple set on a shallow set of steps, and the frontal Tuscan type described by Vitruvius, certainly of local derivation. In some cases both types of temples could be in the same sanctuary or even side-by-side, the house of the god surrounded by the peripteros, the forest of columns. The Tuscan temple, however, is altogether

different entity, a virtual machine for the performance of ritual. Although Vitruvius (*On Architecture* 4.7) provides us with a handy recipe for the construction of a Tuscan temple, its form was adaptable within the constancy required by ritual practice. It is a temple that conforms to an Etrusco-Italic aesthetic. For although the term “Tuscan” is most often used, the geographical range of the evidence suggests that the safer term for this sort of structure is “Etrusco-Italic.”

What has not been much discussed is the question of why both peripteral temples and Tuscan temples are found in all parts of Etruria. The occurrence of peripteral plans cannot be ascribed to Greek influence alone, and there is no clear geographical distribution, even if the peripteral plan seems a later introduction (Mertens 1980). Peripteral temples are found in the south (e.g., at Pyrgi), and in the far north of Etruria (e.g., at Marzabotto; see Sassatelli 1992; Rameri 2005). Peripteral and Tuscan temples were also constructed side by side in sanctuaries, again at Pyrgi, or in the same city: at Marzabotto, for example, the acropolis temple is frontal in the Tuscan manner, while in the city proper, the large temple of Tinia was built in the peripteral style. The choice must result from ritual, and the Tuscan temple (as discussed below), with its high podium and scaenographic setting, was the ideal place for divinatory rites. In both cases, Etruscan architects do not follow strict formulas. That is, no two Tuscan temples are alike – no temple excavated to date even conforms exactly to the Vitruvian dictates – and peripteral temples differ remarkably from Greek prototypes in their aesthetic, with wide intercolumniations and a lack of interest in Greek order. The Tinia temple at Marzabotto, for instance, has a tetrastyle façade but is peculiarly pentastyle in back (Sassatelli 1992; Warden 2012: 91, fig. 5.5).

The Tuscan temple itself was easily recognizable. It was raised on a tall stone podium that was often articulated with characteristic Etruscan rounds at both top and bottom. The relevant formal elements are an unabashed frontality, a strict insistence on axuality, the raising of the temple on an elevated platform on which ritual action would often have taken place and have been easily viewed, and the openness of the façade with broad intercolumniations that would have allowed visual permeability (Figure 12.4). The key element is that relation between building and spatial setting, usually the sanctuary: for the temple was a place for a priest to view sacred space and interpret natural signs according to a carefully worked-out doctrine, the *disciplina etrusca*. The latter had been handed down through divine oracular expression, and its interpretation was the purview of the Etruscan elite, both male and female (van der Meer 1979; Turfa and Gettys 2009; see also Chapter 21). The elevated platform of the Tuscan temple allowed the performer to view and interpret the sacred space. In the case of animal sacrifice that presumably would have taken place in front of this podium, as evidenced by the Piacenza liver (van der Meer 1987) and other visual and textual sources, the topography

of the entrails would have correlated to the sacred space in front of the platform, space that was segmented and whose sections reflected the influence and domain of specific divinities. The Piacenza liver, with its didactic function, is a prime example of the importance of natural phenomena, observed by the elite priest and then interpreted through textual correlation. Another prime example, recently analyzed by Turfa (2012), is the first-century Brontoscopic Calendar of Nigidius Figulus, which survives through Byzantine transmission. It is as important for its insight into the social concerns of the Etruscan elite as for the light that it sheds on ritual practice, the calendrical interpretation of natural signs such as lightning, thunder, and weather (see further, [Chapters 14](#) and [18](#)).



Figure 12.4 Reconstruction of the facade of a Tuscan/Italic temple. Rendering by J. Galloway.

Drawing: courtesy of Jess Galloway.

The ubiquity of sacred spaces is also made clear in the few instances of urban planning that have been documented. The Belvedere Temple at Orvieto is one of the better-preserved examples and hence one of the best known (Boëthius 1970: 45, fig. 33). It forms part of the urban fabric in a prominent position at the eastern edge of the city, oriented to the southeast, perhaps near the entrances. It is of the Tuscan type, presumably with a triple cella, although the evidence for that is slight. What is clear is the strict axuality and frontality of the planning, for in this case the outline of the sanctuary proper has been preserved. The Belvedere temple would have been just one of many temples in Orvieto (judging by the evidence of monumental footings and architectural terracottas found throughout the ancient city) in addition to the major suburban sanctuary at the Campo della Fiera (possibly the site of the *Fanum Voltumnae*), which would have been easily viewed from the southern edge of

the ancient city.

Another Tuscan temple that is relatively well-preserved along with its surrounding area is the Portonaccio Temple at Veii, which was the focus of cult activity for a variety of divinities. It is also situated at the edge of the city, near one of the gates, and has been reconstructed with a triple cella plan (Boëthius 1970: 40, fig. 27). In this case, the sanctuary is not as axially arranged as at Orvieto, and the topography of place has a more organic feel. The sacredness of the place may have been connected to the water sources that fed a pool within the sanctuary as well as to its location near the city entrance. The structure is most remarkable for the extensive series of ridge-pole statues that decorated its roof: figures of divinities that literally walk the sky, setting up a tableau of human bodies that enact what were probably a series of divine narratives, but that would only have been understood when looked at from the sides of the temple. The statues have been preserved so well because they were eventually ritually buried near the temple (Boëthius 1970: 62, fig. 51; see also [Chapter 8](#) for the case of Poggio Civitate).

Perhaps the best known of all Tuscan temples, the Capitulum in Rome, is also one of the most anomalous. It was built under Etruscan rule and presumably by Etruscan builders; the terracotta statues, at least, resulted from an Etruscan workshop, and it is not unreasonable to assume that the temple itself was planned by an Etruscan architect. The sheer size of the enterprise, however, as well as the many innovative features of its design, including the triple cella plan (Hopkins 2012), make it one of the most unusual examples of its type. The setting was clearly as important as the temple itself. The Capitulum dominated the urban landscape of ancient Rome; it was monumental in size but was made even grander and more of a monument by its dominant position on the Capitoline hill, so that the vast area that it overlooked became sacred.

Thus, sacred areas and sanctuaries were an integral part of the physical and ritual landscape in Etruria. A particularly interesting case among temples and sanctuaries that connected to a larger landscape setting is Lake Bolsena, where the placement of sacred spaces around the lake suggests that it might have been considered a *templum* with the individual sacred structures or shrines strategically located to reflect the divinely ordered segmentation of the *disciplina etrusca*. Orientation was clearly important. The axuality resulted from rituals of divination (Prayon 1991; Aveni and Romano 1994a and b), but it has been argued that the orientation of the temple might have varied somewhat as a result of the divinity connected to it (Stevens 2009). At sites like Satricum and Poggio Colla, the orientation of the sacred structures was changed over time, for reasons that are not easy to explain.

There are a number of features of Etruscan temples that are connected to ritual practice and seem characteristically Etruscan: an insistence on boundaries and boundedness that reflects both spatial and divine order; axuality; and human

interpretation through performance in a spatial setting that was scaenographic and designed to heighten the intensity of the spectacle and thus the power of the elite performer(s). Etruscan sacred architecture, because of its close connection to ritual, often has a theatrical component, whether in its form or its setting (Camporeale 2010). The concept of sacred space in the Etruscan city, defined by ritual with careful observation of boundaries, and with interior articulation through orthogonal planning, was also clearly the result of similar ritual practice (see further, [Chapter 7](#)). The rituals are well-known from Roman sources, and the foundation of Rome is a case in point, given the close connection of the early Iron Age and Regal periods in Rome with the Etruscans. Etruscan ritual heavily influenced early Rome, and the legend of the foundation of the city by Romulus, even if just a legend, reflects actual rituals whose meaning is both real and metaphorical, the physical definition of an area that is both civic and sacred. The *pomerium*, the sacred area of the city, was created by plowing a furrow that defined the boundary of what would eventually become the walled city. The power of the furrow as boundary is made clear by the fact that the plow had to be raised each time (three according to Etruscan practice) that a gate or entry was needed. The furrow itself was inviolable, as strong in theory as the massive walls that were later built to defend most Etruscan cities: impassable, conceptually at least, even before strong girdling defenses were built. Thus, the Etruscan city, at least according to such legendary accounts, was a kind of sanctuary and a construct, carefully defined in its size and layout, a space that was ordered according to both the rules of human logic and divine order. And the symbolism of birth and fertility through ritual plowing is clear, with the ripping open of the earth allowing chthonic forces to emerge reminiscent of the Tages myth. The layout of the city itself, therefore, reflected a belief system that resulted from doctrine handed down to the peoples of Etruria in oracular fashion.

If the foundation of Rome is encased in the mists of legend, we have better evidence for the sacredness of urban space at Marzabotto. Here, the orientation of the temples on the acropolis, seemingly determined according to astronomical observation (Gottarelli 2005), aligns the sacred structures on that promontory with the actual center of the city, the crossing of the two main axes, marked by a pit and an incised stone. Excavations at Gonfienti, in the plain to the west of Florence, have shown that the urban layout of Marzabotto is not anomalous, but that city planning in the sixth and fifth centuries was regularized to the point that orthogonal planning with similar orientations can be found on both sides of the Apennines (Poggesi et al. 2005). The layout of the city, quartered according to the practice of the *disciplina etrusca* (Sassatelli 1992: 28, fig. 5), thus observes the cardinal points in the human area – a human-defined order – and the divinely inspired orientation of the temples on the acropolis. As noted above, the Tinia temple within the city proper is aligned to its grid and, even though it is peripteral, it

functions much as Tuscan temple, set back on the north side of the sanctuary (now the city) just to the east of the *cardo*, with its dominant façade facing south. The unusually broad *cardo*, the main north–south axis of Marzabotto, also resembles a boulevard more than a street and may have functioned as a kind of forum area. Certainly the relationship of temple to broad esplanade suggests more of a locus than a place of passage.

The discovery at Marzabotto of a large number of statue bases, and an impressively large (30 centimeter) bronze female figure (Malnati et al. 2005: fig. 4), has also allowed for the identification of a sanctuary at the northeastern edge of the city (Malnati et al. 2005). This identification raises interesting questions of interpretation, especially in relation to Etruscan ritual practice and the question of primary and secondary depositions. The “northeast sanctuary” has produced what is clearly material of ritual import, but how did it get there? Was it deposited in a sanctuary, as the excavators argue, functioning as a series of rich deposits that include both recently excavated material and the important artifacts discovered in earlier excavations? Or was it the result of later intervention, as has been suggested by Sassatelli and Govi, who argue that the material evidence makes better sense as part of the normal paraphernalia of a large structure such as the Tinia temple? They also argue that it may have been dumped at the edge of the city’s terrace by farmers in the nineteenth century who wanted to clear agricultural land of unwanted detritus (Sassatelli and Govi 2010: 26). The problem with the latter theory is that the farmers would have been discarding prime building material (e.g., beautifully squared blocks and bases) as well as remarkable bronzes, but the point that the material is better suited to the *temenos* of a large temple is well-taken. A third possibility is that the deposits at the northeastern edge of the city plateau are secondary deposits. That is, after the abandonment of Marzabotto, the cult material from the Tinia sanctuary was taken and ritually deposited as part of the de-consecration of a sacred area, a ritual act well-attested in Etruria (Edlund-Berry 1994).

Above all, the recent excavations at Marzabotto point out that sacred space is mutable and defined not only by an inherent sacrality but also by human action. And for the Etruscans, for whom many kinds of spaces, or for whom, arguably, all space, was sacred, sacrality is defined on human terms that interpret a divine order that is spatial. It therefore follows that for order to be spatial, then boundaries must be defined. The Etruscan interest in boundaries – or in other words, in human order – was pervasive, and Etruscan ritual in almost every instance reveals an interest in negotiating the relationship of human order to divine will and revelation. Even the creation of Etruria itself was believed to have resulted from a divine imposition of order: “But when Jupiter claimed the land of Aetruia for himself, he established and ordered that the fields be measured and croplands delimited. Knowing the greed of men and their lust for land, he wanted everything proper concerning

boundaries” (de Grummond 2006: 192). It is no wonder that the Etruscan concept of disaster is literally the end of order, as in the prophecy of Vegovia, where the (Etruscan) world comes to an end when boundaries are no longer observed. For the observation of boundaries is at the heart of Etruscan divination and its relation to the sacred spaces where ritual is affected. The spatial order is intimately tied to the social order, and the destruction of the human–divine order results in “great dissention among the people” (*multae dissensiones in populo*: de Grummond 2006: 192). Etruscan ritual with its public and performative expression was part of the glue that bound the social order. Ritual reflected a human interpretation of divine will that was at the heart of an Etruscan doctrine. That doctrine, in turn, supported and reinforced the power of the theocratic elite who dominated the social landscape and thus also defined the physicality of sacred space.

3. Sacred Space and the Topography of Ritual

What emerges from the preceding survey of Etruscan sanctuaries, altars, and temples is that typology is elusive and that sacred spaces could exist almost everywhere. The boundary between secular and sacred is a modern construct; in the Etruscan world, the two could not be so easily differentiated. The cities of the living and of the dead, as well as the natural landscapes that surrounded them, were all places of human–divine negotiation. A case in point is the complex in the Pian di Cività of Tarquinia, that includes a sacred structure (Building Beta) as well as a rich collection of burials, deposits, and sacrificial areas that imbue an urban area with rich religious significance that goes back to the pre-urban period (Moretti Sgubini 2001a: 21–44; Bonghi Jovino 2010; see also [Chapters 7](#) and [18](#)). It is thus almost impossible to generalize about Etruscan sacred space, for it seems that, in a way, all space was sacred to the Etruscans, and that some spaces were more sacred than others, or sufficiently sacred that ritual was regularly performed there. Such spaces were made sacred not only by their nature but also by the topography of ritual action, and there is a wealth of evidence, mostly from material culture, of the detritus that resulted from these activities (Glinister 2000).

Much of the evidence for Etruscan ritual is dedicatory in nature, and the material culture that has been preserved at countless sites shows that there is great regional variation in ritual practice (Turfa 2006: 90–115). This kind of evidence is usually classified as “votive,” a term that is probably overused because votive giving by definition requires a human–divine exchange, a vow that reinforces the reciprocal relationship of the human donor and the god that receives and perhaps acknowledges the gift (Warden 1992; [Chapter 18](#) here). It is a type of gift-exchange that may mirror the gift-exchange that is often at the heart of pre-monetary economies. The wealth of material culture found at

Etruscan sanctuaries is presumably votive, but we can only be sure of actual votive activity when there is an inscription (Bonfante 2006: 9–26), or when the objects (e.g., the anatomical terracottas found at southern Etruscan sanctuaries) have been produced specifically for ritual dedication. These are objects, therefore, that are votive by nature rather than by intent.

The many recent excavations of sacred contexts have produced a virtual golden age in the study of religion and ritual in Etruria (Comella 2005; Comella and Mele 2006; Turfa 2006 and 2012; van der Meer 2010 and 2011). The practice of dedicating objects, of turning things back to the earth, goes back to the early Iron Age (if not earlier) and may mirror the late Bronze and Early Iron Age practice of depositing hoards of bronze objects in the earth (Hoekstra 1996). The first challenge in dealing with votive gifts and votive deposits is to figure out why they were dedicated. There are countless possibilities: foundation, celebration, expiation, propitiation, purification, expiation, or even obliteration (Bonghi Jovino 2005: 43), in addition to personal giving. A second challenge is to connect material objects to ritual. This is particularly difficult when objects are found in secondary deposits such as in a large *stips* that may include things dedicated in a variety of ways and over a long period of time. Primary deposits in closed contexts (e.g., the bronzes deposited and ritually broken from the Civita in Tarquinia), are relatively rare (Bonghi Jovino and Chiaramonte Treré 1997; Bonghi Jovino 2005; see also [Chapter 18](#)). Fortunately, modern excavation methods are beginning to move us beyond materiality, allowing for better explanations about the processes of ritual. As the physicality of ritual becomes better understood, the topography of ritual – that is, the relationship of ritual action to sacred space – will become clearer. The recent discovery at the northern Etruscan sanctuary of Poggio Colla of a series of ritual contexts that run the gamut from a large *stips* to foundation deposits and, even more intriguing, closed ones, presents a good example about how a consideration of topography is changing our knowledge of ritual behavior.

The rich evidence for votive religion at Poggio Colla has been discussed elsewhere (Warden 2009b, 2011 and 2012) and awaits full publication. But several of the deposits provide first-hand evidence for the actual physicality – the performance of ritual – at a sanctuary where a monumental temple (Phase 1) was destroyed and parts ritually buried, with two subsequent rectangular courtyard-complexes (Phases 2–3) that had an altar at their center (Warden et al. 2005). The many ritual deposits are associated with an underground fissure and follow a strict topography: a large votive *stips* is, in fact, layered into cuttings in the bedrock that mirror the orientation of the earlier temple and that point toward the fissure. The fissure is clearly natural and the underground “chamber” is as yet unexcavated. Sometime after the Phase I temple was destroyed or dismantled, a large molded block of sandstone, part of the Phase I temple, was placed in front of the fissure, oriented

approximately east–west (Figure 12.5). The broken block was also neatly turned upside down, and next to it were deposited a fine gold ring and long strands of gold wire that were probably part of an elite textile (see further, Chapters 16 and 21). The pattern of systematic breakage is paralleled by the broken or deliberately deformed objects found on the Civita at Tarquinia (Bonghi Jovino and Chiaramonte Treré 1997). Deposits associated with female dedications (Castor 2009) and a recently-excavated bucchero stamp with a scene of a woman, possibly a goddess, giving birth (Perkins 2012), suggest the existence of a chthonic cult connected to a female deity in the sanctuary (Chellini 2012: 260).



Figure 12.5 “Fissure Deposit,” fifth – fourth century BCE. From Poggio Colla.

Photo: P. G. Warden.

Most telling in terms of the relationship of ritual action to setting is the “inscription deposit,” excavated in 2005 and 2006 in a room at the northwestern corner of the courtyard (Warden 2012). A large sandstone cylinder, about 70 centimeters in diameter, was found carefully placed upside-down in the middle of a circular pit. Since this element most likely originally functioned as the top of a votive column or as a small circular altar, it is clear that it was dismantled before being placed in the center of the pit. To the north of this cylinder, carefully placed at right angles to one another and roughly oriented to the axes of the plateau, were two sandstone statue bases. The smaller is pentagonal, just under 13 centimeters high, and has a hole at the top for the insertion of a bronze figurine; it was oriented north–south. The larger base, 33.5 centimeters high, is pyramidal and also features a hole at the top

(see Fedeli and Warden 2006: fig. 4 for an illustration of the context). The hole still has the lead fitting that would have held in place a bronze figure of significant size. One face bears an orthograde inscription that gives the name of an elite Etruscan male, *Nakaške Vešna[s]* (Camporeale 2012: 187–188). Two bronze objects, perhaps ritually broken, along with strands of intertwined gold wire, were placed to the south. Especially dramatic was the discovery in 2006 on the west side of the cylinder of a small mesomphalic bronze bowl that may have been used for a libation. The bowl is very thin and it has taken two seasons of careful conservation to clean and consolidate it. The bones of two different small animals – a piglet and a ruminant – were interred within it, deliberately placed both under and inside the bowl (see further, Trentacoste 2013: 79–80 and fig. 3).

The placement of these objects, especially in light of their relationship to one another, allows the reconstruction the actual sequence of ritual actions. The altar or votive column was dismantled or destroyed in some manner: the heavy cylinder that formed its upper part was carefully placed upside-down in the center the pit. The two statue bases were arranged perpendicular to one another to the north of the cylinder, while the parts of the broken bronze implement and a textile with gold thread (all that remains is the gold wire) were placed to the south. The priest, most likely standing to the west and facing east, must then have poured a libation and placed the bronze mesomphalic bowl at his feet on the west side of the pit along with remains of a sacrificial animal. A second bowl was deliberately crumpled and stuck in the ground next to the first bowl. Was this ceremony part of the normal ritual at Poggio Colla, the interment of sacred objects of an earlier age, or did it result from a violent destruction and looting? Whatever the reason, the objects are aligned with the axis of the sanctuary's architecture, making it clear that the sacred space and the ritual actions functioned along the same lines.

4. Conclusion

Ritual is by its nature performative and spatial, and Etruscan sacred spaces were the setting for its performance. These spaces could be carefully planned and articulated scaenographic settings, as the Tuscan temple and the funerary altar attached to the Tumulo del Sodo II in Cortona demonstrate. They could also be more organic and less archaeologically visible settings where ritual was performed by a simple ash altar or a natural feature such as a fissure, a spring, or even a river where a single object might be given to the gods (e.g., the Villanovan helmet deposited in the sands of the Tanaro River (Mandolesi and Sannibale 2012: 38)). Form and meaning cannot be separated (Izzet 2000; 2001). Ritual defined and articulated sacred space, and the topography of those spaces and the buildings within them was ritually performed and

determined. Thus, in Etruria, ritual defined space and space informed ritual. Both served to reinforce the hierarchies of a social landscape that, in Etruria at least, was controlled and dominated by the theocratic elite (Warden 2012: 93–7, 100–101).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Etruscan sacred space needs to be situated in the broader context of the built environment, for which see Boëthius 1970: 32–102. The most extensive general summaries of the typology of sacred architecture will be found in Colonna 1985 and 2006. De Grummond and Edlund-Berry 2011 provide discussion of broader contexts, including material culture. For the larger considerations of location and place, see Edlund 1987 and Izzet 2001. Recent detailed discussions of the Tuscan/Italic temple can be found in Izzet 2000 and Warden 2012, and, for the Capitolium in Rome, Hopkins 2012.

PART III
Evidence in Context

CHAPTER 13

Etruscan Skeletal Biology and Etruscan Origins

Marshall J. Becker

In memory of Loretana Salvadei

1. Introduction

From the earliest Greek and Roman reports about the Etruscans' culture, some of their customs were considered to be shocking, if not simply interesting. The ethnocentrism of the reporters, or their belief that their own mores were the only correct system of behavior, led some non-Etruscan observers to emphasize specific differences in their lifestyle, such as overeating (Turfa 2012 and her [Chapter 22](#) in this volume) and conspicuous consumption (see [Chapter 20](#)). Ethnocentric ideas also tend to link any differences in behavior with biological differences, a fallacy that equates culture with "race." By pointing out different Etruscan cultural behaviors, some Greek and Roman observers, following Herodotus, further implied that their neighbors were not only outsiders, but also immigrants into Italy from some location where lesser peoples existed (Briquel 2013: 40–45).

Anthropological research over the past 150 years has not altered popular perceptions that behavior is biologically based or that culture is an inherited rather than a learned phenomenon. The Roman perception, based on the writings of Herodotus (c.400 BCE) and accepted by the scholarly community until quite recently, was that the Etruscan "people" had migrated to Italy from Lydia in western Turkey. Dionysius of Halicarnassas (c.100 BCE) believed the Etruscans to be an indigenous Italic people, yet the archaeological community took many years to provide conclusive support for the position that Etruscan society was the product of *in situ* (autochthonous) development (Briquel 1984, 1991, 1993, 2013; also Camporeale 1997). Many others have since employed new data to reach the same conclusions, but the subject of the differences between Etruscans and Romans, two proximal if not overlapping cultures, continues to be of interest. The recent renewal of apparently retrograde ideas supporting a migration of Etruscan peoples into Italy from Turkey (see below) leads us to revisit the contributions of physical anthropologists (human biologists) to the discussion.

In 1958, Gordon E.W. Wolstenholme, founding director of the Ciba Foundation in London, organized one of several symposia around the theme of Etruscan origins (Wolstenholme and O'Connor 1958). It brought together several leading Etruscologists, who offered useful syntheses of what was then known about their culture and remains. Some compared ancient with modern bones (e.g., Barnicot and Brothwell 1958), while others addressed “genetical characteristics” and “blood groups.” These were the biological data sets then available to scholars who wished to consider possible relationships within and the ancestry of a specific population. Group discussions revolved around these yet unproven techniques, revealing an awareness of their limitations. Fifteen years later, I brought these same approaches with me to Italy to investigate similar questions regarding native populations and Greek colonists (Becker 1982a, 1982b, 1985).

Following the 1958 symposium, Don Brothwell went on to ask other questions about Etruscan skeletal biology (Brothwell and Carr 1962). It was evident even then that there was an insufficient series of skeletons available from any site, and any particular period of time at that site, to provide a useful reference population. Not only were such samples seemingly unattainable, but no efforts were being made to collect the skeletons. The ability to reach any conclusions based on the limited evidence, however, did not deter efforts to “evaluate” small Etruscan skeletal samples. Not considered in these early studies were the problems of subjective evaluation of even the most basic matters, such as the age and sex of individuals. The need for statistical methods that might have given meaning to the data sets went unnoticed.

2. A Brief History of Skeletal Studies in Etruria

The impressive tomb architecture, wall paintings, gold jewelry and the outstanding examples of imported Greek pottery found in both funerary and religious contexts have long been the focus for archaeological research in Etruria. Assemblages of elite artifacts provided the principal database through which Etruscan society was known. This “embarrassment of riches” (Becker 2005a) attracted so much attention in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the tomb contexts in which these objects were found, the villages and cities in which these people had lived, and other aspects of Etruscan life, were largely ignored. For nearly two centuries, their skeletons remained of marginal interest to Etruscologists. The bones within these tombs, trampled by tomb robbers in the past and disregarded by early excavators, have only recently been recognized as a valuable source of information about life in Etruria’s various urban and rural communities.

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, there had been some interest in the data that could be recovered from the human skeletons at

Tarquinia and other archaeological sites. A history of these early studies has been discussed elsewhere (see Becker 2002a: 70–74; Ms. A). During that period, a number of physicians and anatomists suggested that regional variations in skull shapes could be used to identify the origins of specific populations and individuals. The possibility that this approach could be used to contradistinguish Etruscans from Romans, and to match Etruscans with Lydians, appears to have gone unrecorded. Efforts by these proto-physical anthropologists to formalize craniometric data in meaningful ways were thwarted by a number of factors. The use of biological evidence to understand Etruscan origins and aspects of Etruscan society has come a long way since Nicolucci (1869) and others wrestled with these issues. Questions involving the incidence of brachycephaly (e.g., short, or round-headedness) as it related to the Etruscans was then a dominant aspect of this research. However, the “sexing” of skeletons by these early physical anthropologists was only of incidental interest to antiquarian concerns in the nineteenth century.

Controversies regarding head shapes and their meanings, or perhaps lack of significance, now can be understood in terms of the history of archaeology in Italy and elsewhere. The failure of skull studies was among the factors that led Italian archaeologists in the early twentieth century to follow a separate path from their colleagues in physical anthropology (cf. Becker 2002a: 12–17). Unfortunately, by the 1920s, the proto-physical anthropologists had created an impression among archaeologists that only intact skulls, if any bones at all, were worth retrieval.

As the archaeology of Etruria matured, aspects of modern skeletal research became a useful means by which Etruscan social organization might be explored (cf. Becker 2002b). During the past 50 years, the various techniques used to study human remains and interpret the findings have become increasingly sophisticated (Arnold and Wicker 2001). Now, even partially recovered skeletons, a few teeth, or even a sampling of the bits of bone from cremations can yield reliable data on age and sex (Becker 1999a, also 1982a; Becker, Turfa, and Algee 2009). In contrast, during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, Etruscan grave goods were used to evaluate the gender of their “owners.” In some cases, these evaluations are highly reliable (e.g., Toms 1986). Where artifacts were not found in graves, or do not provide a clear indication of gender, skeletal material can be used to answer many questions (see Bietti Sestieri, De Santis, and Salvadei 1988).

Recently, the problems inherent in only using grave goods to evaluate the presumed sex of the deceased were demonstrated after the discovery of two, or perhaps more, burials in an intact tomb at Tarquinia in 2013. Overseen by Alessandro Mandolesi (University of Turin) and Alfonsina Russo (Soprintendenze Archeologica dell’Etruria Meridionale), the excavation of a rock-cut tomb in the Doganaccia necropolis yielded full grave goods as well as a complete skeleton lying on one of the benches. As reported on

Archaeology Magazine's website on September 20, 2013 and subsequently repeated widely through popular web media (Lorenzi 2013a), the "spear" found next to the body led a reporter to identify the deceased as a man. Also in the tomb were the burned remains of a second individual, then said to be his wife. Subsequently the sexes of these two individuals were reversed, again based on the grave goods. The individual whose artifacts included the spear was declared to be "an aristocratic woman" (Lorenzi 2013b). No physical anthropologist was present during the excavation and to date no scientific study of the bones has been conducted. Professor Mandolesi has extended an invitation to me to study these remains. If skeletal recovery was limited and multiple cremations within perishable containers in the tomb were present, the evidence for these may be recognized.

Pieces of skeletons or a single tooth are, of course, far less informative than carefully excavated skeletons. Even as late as the 1980s, as the need to recover significant numbers of skeletons from a single time period within a single site became more evident to human biologists, the recovery of human remains from Etruscan tombs continued to be ignored. Some archaeologists in Etruria came to recognize the importance of recovering more than intact human skulls, yet the general perception was that physical anthropologists worked in laboratories on whatever skeletal material was delivered to them. Over the many months I was present at Tarquinia, only rarely was I called into the field to aid in the excavations. During the seven years in which I spent a month each season at Tarquinia (1988–94), and after several decades of research on human skeletal remains in Italy, many of the scholars and the various problems that plague studies of these remains became well-known to me.

3. Skeletal Studies at Tarquinia: 1981–2013

Since 1981, the recovery and analysis of human remains recovered from excavations at Tarquinia have set the standard for research in this field in Etruria. After the 1987 discovery of the Tomb of the Blue Demon (Cataldi 1987, 1993; Gore 1988), Maria Cataldi initiated a long-term program of skeletal study at Tarquinia (see Becker 1990, 1993, summarized in 2005a) under the auspices of the Soprintendenze Archeologica dell'Etruria Meridionale. The data have enabled us to evaluate not only how these tombs were used but also to understand better how Etruscan society operated as a whole. Skeletal studies at Tarquinia have provided a small database from which several questions can be considered.

The Burials of Women in Etruria

The actual and specific roles of women in Etruscan society became a focus for research in the 1980s (Nielsen 1985, Rallo 1989; also Becker 2002c). At this time, Marjatta Nielsen (1988–1989) posed an innovative question relating to an apparently skewed sex ratio as suggested by the evidence from Etruscan archaeological contexts (see Becker 2005a). Nielsen’s research focused primarily on the inscriptions and other non-skeletal data relating to the “Late Etruscan” period in Tarquinia. Hopkins (1966) had largely discredited the use of epitaphs alone in exploring general demographic analyses among the ancient Romans (e.g., Durand 1960), a position recently reaffirmed by Scheidel (2001). Nielsen (1988–1989: 54) explored a somewhat different approach, seeking to understand trends relating to the interment of women as well as the role of women and families within ancient Etruria by examining funerary inscriptions and comparing them to the extremely limited osteological data then available (see Becker 2005a: n. 3). Nielsen found some agreement in the archaeological and biological data sets, despite the limited information from skeletal remains study (Mallegni, Fornaciari, and Tarabella 1980: 190; but, see Becker 2001a). Nielsen’s incorporation of osteological evidence therefore provided an important “new” facet of modern studies of this ancient society (cf. Becker 2005a).

Nielsen had “not looked at single tomb complexes” at Tarquinia for various reasons, primarily, the lack of published data regarding the skeletons of the actual people found in these contexts (Nielsen 1988–1989: 54; cf. Becker 2005a: n. 4). Today, considerably more skeletal data are available from these small tombs at Tarquinia (e.g., Becker 1990, 1993, 2002b, also 2000; Vargiu and Becker 2005: 409–411), and they reveal that the sex ratio at this site is in agreement with Nielsen’s evidence from Etruscan funerary inscriptions (1988–89: 57).

Inscriptions associated with inhumations at Tarquinia can be tied to the burials of higher-status individuals. A bias in favor of males would be expected among these inhumations. Females, on the other hand, are more commonly represented among the cremations. Examination of any series of cremations from these Etruscan contexts, even where inhumation was the norm as at Tarquinia, reveals a reversed sex ratio, with females being the overwhelming majority of the cremated individuals found in urns. This is true for the people in cinerary contexts at Tarquinia as well as for Etruscans represented by bones held in the Etruscan urns at the National Museum in Copenhagen (Becker 2001b, also 1997a), at the Field Museum (Becker 1995a), and in many other museum collections. Where cremation was the normal mortuary process, as at Volterra, females were more commonly placed in smaller cinerary chests than males (Becker 2001a). The finding that women had lower status than males is related to the sex-ratio phenomenon at Tarquinia, where we have, perhaps, the largest number of skeletons,

inhumations and cremations that have been studied from any Etruscan site.

Nielsen’s questions had been formulated at a fortuitous point in time. The skeletal research program at Tarquinia provided the evidence that confirmed her inferences regarding an apparently distorted sex ratio among individuals interred within Etruscan tombs (see [Table 13.1](#)). However, analysis of the 40 human skeletons recovered from Tarquinia during extensive excavations in 1989 found a sex ratio that was highly skewed in favor of women. These findings reflect the problems associated with consideration of sex ratio in populations of fewer than 50 people where statistical chance is a major factor. The sex ratio for the combined 1987–89 excavated populations appears “normal,” but these figures were not sustained when new data were added from excavations after 1989. As the number of individuals in the sample increased, the balance shifted toward a far greater number of males than would be expected in a normal population. In any skeletal study, the larger the population evaluated the more likely it will reveal a normal sex ratio. This is the case at Osteria dell’Osa (ancient Gabii; see Becker and Salvadei 1992) where the population recovered for study was over 600. The larger the size of any skeletal population included in a specific study, the less factors of “chance” play in distorting the sex ratio.

Table 13.1 Sex of Adults from Tombs at Tarquinia (revised from Becker 2005a).

Date of excavations and references	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
1987 (Becker 1990)	16 (59 %)	9 (33 %)	2 (8 %)	27
1989 (Becker 1993)	15 (37.5 %)	23 (57.5 %)	2 (5 %)	40
1987–95 (Becker 2002a)	99 (49.5 %)	70 (35 %)	31 (15.5 %)	200
Totals	130	102	35	267

Note: Williams et al.’s (2012) report on 278 adults from Tarquinia covers the period through the first century BCE, a period that may or may not include the 79 undated individuals. Their numbers suggest that only 11 adults have been studied or added to this collection since 1994.

By 1995, when the total number of individuals in this specific new skeletal study at Tarquinia had reached 200, the discrepancy between the numbers of males and females had grown to the levels anticipated by Nielsen. The expected human sex ratio of c.“98” (c.1:1) was not found, but a 1:1 sex ratio could be achieved in this sample if all 31 of the “sex unknown” skeletons were female. While this is unlikely, the percentage of females in the “sex unknown” category may be high. At Tarquinia, during the period when large chamber tombs were in use, factors associated with social complexity

influenced the apparent sex ratio derived from skeletal analysis. Status differences are factors that appear in the burial conditions, as females of the family as well as household slaves are buried in lower-status places within the tombs (see Arnold 1988). It is likely that most of the unassigned individuals are females, accounting for the apparently skewed sex ratio. Lower status burials from Tarquinia were summarized in Becker 2005a (from Cavagnaro Vanoni 2002: *passim*; see also Becker 2007).

Reconstructing the Etruscan “Family”

The principal occupants of the large chamber tombs at Tarquinia were the heads of the elite families for whom the structures were built (Bonfante 1981). How their in-marrying wives related to the overall composition of these “families” remains an issue of particular importance (cf. Becker 2002b). Nielsen (1988–89: 65) equated the Etruscan *lautn* with the Latin *familia*, seeing it as an extended unit that included the slaves and other property of a kin group. Anthropologically speaking, the Etruscan “house” may have been a residential kin group consisting of the patrilineal core members and anyone else resident with them. The unilineal descent rules (patrilineal) well-known for the Roman culture presumably paralleled those of the Etruscans, with both systems being cross-cut by factors of residence as related to marriage (cf. Becker 2005a). As a residential kinship unit, the Etruscan *lautn* conferred on the occupants of the “house” various rights, including burial within or near the family tomb. For large tombs, the dromos and chamber or chambers are considered as distinct from the smaller tombs in the immediate vicinity (e.g., Cavagnaro Vanoni 2002).

Several scholars have suggested that Etruscan tombs at Caere (modern Cerveteri), and perhaps other Etruscan cities, replicated or paralleled the structure of the household (cf. Prayon 1975: 149–174), an idea that has become generally accepted (J. M. Turfa: *pers. com.*). Prayon’s speculative suggestion now can be tested. At Tarquinia, where we now have extensive skeletal data, there is no evidence of a relationship between these well-documented Etruscan tombs and the arrangement of the “houses” in which the dead had lived. We infer that slaves as well as stable hands and other nominally “free” individuals who lived outside the main residence, or chambers, of the living must be buried nearby, if not in lesser parts of the large chamber tombs of these Tarquinians. Lower status members of the household were cremated and placed in perishable containers that were placed in lowly parts of the tomb chambers, or in the dromos. Or they may have been buried outside the chamber tombs, in *pozzi* dug into or around the tumulus covering the main tomb (cf. Serra Ridgway 1996: 133–147; Vargiu and Becker 2005).

Perishable Containers: A Critical Variable

Nielsen's (1988–89: 84–89) discussion of seven possible “tomb types” addresses many questions relating to the variety of status rankings within a family, as represented by the people who might be found within a large tomb. Nielsen's “types” derive from elite tombs while ignoring the more simple interments that survive in considerable numbers at Tarquinia. I suspect that even greater numbers of cremation burials of lower-status individuals, both within large tombs and outside of them, were not recognized because they included only perishable grave goods and had been placed in perishable containers. Nielsen's varieties of social differences need to be extended to include slaves and low-status non-slaves as well as those people who had various degrees of freedom and were resident with a high-status family but not their kin. Certainly some house slaves and other chattel were buried within large tombs, but they were placed in locations that everyone would have recognized as reflecting their lowly positions within the household (for more on slavery in Etruria, see Benelli 2013).

Lucia Cavagnaro Vanoni (2002: 375–376) points out that cremation burials at Tarquinia reappeared in the early sixth century and continued to be used through the third century. Cremation during this period formed but one variation in individual mortuary programs, but individuals interred within these impressive mortuary structures were differentially placed depending on their status. In the large chamber tombs at Tarquinia (e.g., see [Figures 3.3, 19.1, 24.4](#)), there are many possible locations for placing burials outside the primary bench surfaces where inhumations and cremations in urns were generally located. Cremations also were placed in stone or ceramic urns, chests, and all sorts of perishable containers such as wooden stave containers, baskets, and bags of leather or cloth. These lesser containers were placed on the floor space between benches, in niches and the floor along the dromos, and even on the steps leading to a dromos. Bags also could be hung from nails driven into the walls anywhere within the tomb.¹

Cavagnaro Vanoni's (2002: 384–393) important study of Tomb 5967, dated to c.450–425 BCE and described as a “Tomba con costodia,” includes a prime example of a cremation buried within a perishable container. A hollowed block measuring roughly 50 by 60 centimeters was inverted over the burial, which included a fine *pelike* (see Cavagnaro Vanoni 2002: Fig. 13:1) in which a few human bones were found. This small vessel measures only 20 centimeters in diameter and stands 25.7 centimeters tall. The volume of a container needed to hold a complete adult human *ossilegium* is much greater than provided by this small vessel (but see Becker 1996a). Nearby, to the south and a bit west of the *pelike*, was a pile of bones in a perfect circle that was c.20 centimeters in diameter. This feature most likely represents an

ossilegium that had been placed in a wooden (perishable) vessel similar in form to Chiusine wheel-turned cinerary urns. F. Mallegni and G. Tartarelli suggested “che tutti e due I gruppi di ossa” (both of the groups of bone) from the *pelike* and from the circular pile, are adult remains, both probably female (pers. com. to Cavagnaro Vanoni). They found no duplication or overlap in the two sets of bones and indicate that these could derive from only one person. This theory is perfectly reasonable, but the archaeological evidence suggests, in contrast, the presence of two people, perhaps a woman and her maid.

As noted above, the Iron Age practice of cremation reappeared at Tarquinia during the early sixth century BCE (see also Becker 2002a: 697–698 n. 2, for the skeletal evidence showing it in place by the late sixth century) and may have been a space-saving part of the mortuary programs for lower-status people (but, see T. 6272, Becker 2002a: 695). The nature of the container into which a person’s bones were deposited also reflects their status: it could be a marble urn or chest, an imported Greek vessel, a wooden box or a leather bag. Commination of the *ossilegium* would considerably reduce the size of the container needed to inter these bits, and in some cases, not all of the burned bone may have been included (cf. Becker 1996b). If placed in a perishable container, the pile of burned bone that was gathered and then interred could easily go unrecognized, even by excavators concerned with careful skeletal recovery. Any number of other “cultural formation processes” (Weiss-Krejci 2001: 769; Becker 1996b) could contribute to difficulties in bone recognition in the field, and thus hinder the retrieval of skeletal material. Both of these factors reduce the chances for subsequent study and interpretation.

Status variables relating to gender among the elite as well as to the positions of lesser kin in the household and their retainers and slaves, are lost when not recorded in the archaeological record (see Arnold 1988). Field and galley slaves, for example, may not have been interred within these chambers, or even within the principal cemetery area. Yet, the remains of some low status members of the household may have been dug into the burial mound or into the surrounding ground that formed part of the complex that constituted a family tomb. The extraordinary density of tombs of all sizes at Tarquinia, and their intertwined entries and chambers, would require considerable effort to reconstruct their spatial boundaries, but focusing only on the elite goods within these chambers allows a great deal of evidence to be ignored. Whether we can reconstruct details of family groups, or of other non-kin relationships among these multiple interments, remains to be seen (cf. Swaddling and Prag 2002).

Problems of data recovery can be overcome by collecting even the smallest bits of bone and teeth from a tomb, as demonstrated by Gabriella Barbieri (2004: 175–189) in her Appendix 2 of the Blera excavation report (Becker 2004). In the past, the application of methods of careful data recovery was

often ignored because archaeologists were distracted by the impressive architecture, painted walls and luxury goods within these tombs and failed to search for bits of burned bone and other ephemeral indicators of cultural behavior. Lack of attention to these details reflects a view of archaeology made while standing on the left side of the “Great Divide” that separates Classical Archaeology from the archaeology associated with American anthropology (see Dyson 1993). As indicated by the recent subjective pronouncements made regarding the sexes and perhaps the numbers of individuals found at Tarquinia in 2013, the present situation regarding skeletal studies in Etruria remains problematical. Pronouncements made by archaeologists prior to a professional evaluation by trained scholars continues to distort information regarding tomb use at Tarquinia and in most other parts of Etruria.

Social Class and Mortality Rates

Note was made earlier that the sex ratio of the 600+ people recovered during the excavations at the Late Iron Age settlement at Osteria dell’Osa, ancient Gabii (Bietti Sestieri 1992a, 1992b) was within the expected range (c.1:1; Becker and Salvadei 1992). There were also minimal status differentials at this site, and incipient class stratification appears only in its later phases. The sample from Tarquinia that is the focus of this chapter dates from the sixth to first centuries BCE. The latter periods reflect an urbanized population with the complex social stratification that characterized what we call Etruscan society. Features of urban life in Etruscan Tarquinia are reflected in the complexity of tomb use patterns that we now are trying to decode.

Archaeological data indicating where in a large chamber tomb each individual was placed enables us to make reliable inferences regarding the social class of that person. Where we have these data for the people within the tombs at Tarquinia, the results of the skeletal analysis provides impressive suggestions regarding social behavior in ancient South Etruria. For example, the bones of the 28 year-old female found lying on the floor of Tarquinia’s Tomba 6276 represent a servant (Becker 2002b: 699). Lower status also is inferred for two or more women found in the dromos of Tomba 6272. The main chamber of Tomba 6272, however, includes two benches on which are distinctly different assemblages of bone. The left bench held 4 adults (2M, 2F), including one female who had been cremated. On the right bench, only the bones of a female aged 15.5 years were recovered. The possibility that the cremated remains of other sub-adults who were in perishable containers also were on the right bench cannot be verified. The damage done to human remains by looters, and the problems of excavators who could not recognize burned

skeletal remains, renders difficult the recovery of the evidence needed to evaluate the placements of people of varying status and age categories (Cataldi 2001).

Human males typically die at a rate faster than women at every stage of life. The factors are not well-known, but the higher rate continues after birth, and at puberty, a time that includes “more risky behaviors,” or what is called “the risk-prone behavior hypothesis.” As Ian Owens (2001: 2008) points out, “male-biased mortality among nonhuman mammals has also been explained in terms of more risky behaviors by males compared with females.” These questions of sex differences in mortality are important to understanding and interpreting our expectations regarding skeletal populations.

Regardless of mortality patterns, ultimately all members of a society die and are subjected to mortuary programs that include burial. Collectively, the ages at death of all members of a society provide the information needed to reconstruct a mortality curve. All these people may not be buried in a single cemetery convenient for excavation. The similarity of mortality curves from one society to another is remarkable, with differences so minimal as to render them nearly indistinguishable from one culture to another. Thus when Nielsen asks, “Where have all the women gone?” she is seeking an answer that relates to the cultural patterns used by the Tarquinians to dispose of their dead. Her question also may be posed as “Where are the ‘missing’ women interred?” Nielsen used a data set that is strongly status-related (inscriptions) to determine the gender of the people in these tombs, and her results seem to correlate extremely well with the skeletal evidence. However, the skeletal evidence may also reflect status differences in the use of cremation at Tarquinia as well as problems of skeletal recovery.

The lower status of women in South Etruria reflects a common cross-cultural phenomenon, with a correspondence expected between funerary treatment and biologically determined status, as indicated by stature, from that context. When Jon Robb and his colleagues (2001) did *not* find this type of correlation at Pontecagnano, they concluded that their findings probably were anomalous. At Tarquinia, as at other Etruscan sites, we would not expect women to be equally represented in mortuary inscriptions, but more commonly found in less elaborate mortuary contexts such as small cinerary urns. Surprisingly, of the 23 cremations from recent excavations at Tarquinia (Becker Ms. A), 13 were evaluated as male and only nine as female (one could not be sexed). Thus, the evidence from those cremated bones that have been recovered during recent excavations at Tarquinia once again suggests the presence of more males than females in this small sample. This may be a result of recovering, or retaining, only the burned bones that are found in the more elaborate containers and discarding, or failing to recognize, clusters of burned bone that had been held in perishable containers.

Of note in reviewing these skeletal data from Tarquinia are Nielsen’s

suggestions (1988– 1989: 62) regarding the “Archaic Period” (650–500 BCE), or roughly the period that Cataldi calls “The Urban Peak” (580–475 BCE). The ratio of female to male skeletons is even lower than the c.40 percent that Nielsen suggests as an overall average at the site based on the texts. This observation also can be tested using the skeletal data from the two related groups used in my own analysis from Tarquinia. Among the 27 burials dating from the latter part of the so-called “L’Età dei Principi” (725–580 BCE), plus those from the Urban Peak (580–475 BCE, see [Table 13.1](#)), we find only eight females represented (30 percent). If we include burials from the earlier part of “L’Età dei Principi,” the total number of burials goes up from 27 to 32 but the proportion of them that are female drops to 28 percent (Becker 2002b). These skeletal data from Tarquinia thus provide significant support for Nielsen’s observation regarding the sex ratio of burials made during her designated “Archaic Period.” This finding could be an accurate indication of the changing status of women in Etruscan society. Lower status for women would be expected within the earlier periods of urbanizing Etruria. Various types of change in Etruscan society, as recognized in the archaeological record, may be setting the stage for the improved status of women, at least among the emerging elite (see also Dyson 1988).

If we return to the basic analyses of these individual skeletons, we find that a great number of “males” are identified in the records as “M ???” (that is, “possibly male”). Most of these derive from smaller, less well-positioned cremations of the type that we might identify archaeologically as “female.” If these are shifted to “F ???,” the sex ratio appears to be more “normal.” Also of importance in this evaluation is the observation that the two periods spanning 725 and 475 BCE have significantly skewed sex ratios. In my previous study of these data (Becker 2002b), I had suggested extracting the 32 burials in the sample from Tarquinia that are dated to between 725 and 475 BCE from the total of 200 adults identified here and evaluated for all periods at the site. This generates a sample of only 168 individuals from other periods, including 76 males (46 percent), 61 females (36 percent) and 31 indeterminate (18 percent). These percentages are close to an expected sex ratio (see [Table 13.2](#)). While these numbers are interesting, and perhaps suggestive, they still lack statistical significance. Considerably more information will be needed to sustain any conclusions based on this limited and preliminary sample.

Table 13.2 Numbers of males and females in this sample arranged by periods defined by Cataldi (1993; skeletal evaluations from Becker 2002b).

Dates	Male	Female	Sex unknown	Age 5.5–16.5	Notes
900–725 BCE	1	0	0	0	
725–580 BCE	11	5	0	0	

580–475 BCE	12	4	0	3	In a cluster of bucca graves
475–425 BCE	1	0	0	0	
425–375 BCE	0	2	0	1	The only unsexed case now has been reevaluated to be a child of age 12
375–250 BCE	23	23	10	7	4 are definitely children
250 BCE–908 CE		6	6	1	5 others need further study
90–500 CE	3	3	2	1	
Modern	0	2	0	0	
Undated	40	27	12	0	33% of the entire population are not dated
Totals	99	70	31	—	N = 200 adults

In re-examining the Tarquinia data, ten years after the publication noted in [Table 13.2](#), I suggest that there may be other factors relating to finds from the period between 725 and 475 BCE that created an “unbalanced” skeletal sample. What may be needed is closer study of the archaeological contexts of those 250 years of history at Tarquinia. The osteological studies used at this site, overall, provide a well-documented sample of remains that derive from contexts with a 1400-year span. The 200 adults identified, therefore, provide us with only one person per seven years of activity at that site. The best sample within the collection at Tarquinia consists of 46 adults from the period between 375 and 250 BCE. While this is a significant sample, we do not know how genetically mixed this population might have been (cf. Lazer 1997: 102–106). While not necessarily “internationally” mixed, prosopographic data suggest that marriage among high-status families, such as those best preserved in Tarquinia’s elite tombs, was considerable.

The Burials of Children (Sub-Adults and Perinatals)

Another interesting finding from the research program at Tarquinia concerns the presence of children in the funerary environment. Of the 200 individuals identified, only 13 (6.5 percent) were found to be sub-adults (16 years and under), and none of these 13 was below 5.5 years of age.

Placement of cremations within perishable containers was initially suggested as an explanation for the low numbers of sub-adult finds and the complete absence of remains of children below the age of 5.5 years in the various cemeteries at Tarquinia.

However, children between the ages of 5.5 and 16.5 years at Tarquinia appear in normal percentages. In fact, perinatals and children below 5.5 years were buried in separate and special cemeteries (Becker 1997a, b; esp. 2007, 2011) throughout Etruria. These special zones, in the vicinity of a spring or water source, insured that their spirits would have a route back to being reborn. Children above the age of 5.5 years were buried in the adult burial area (Becker 2002b: 695–696). Cremation was used for processing the remains of “relatively” lower status individuals and these *ossilegia* may also have been added to other cremation “urns” or placed into perishable containers for burial.²

Sub-adults between the ages of 5.5 and 16.5 years are represented in expected numbers in the chamber tombs as well as the smaller *pozzi* graves at Tarquinia. Nielsen (1988–1989: 54) believed that slaves and most of the children of the household “must have been buried in a way that has left no traces in the archaeological evidence.” This conclusion derives from her assumption that skilled attempts had been made to recover and study cremations at Tarquinia. Contributing to this problem at Tarquinia is Nielsen’s (1988–1989: 54) discounting of the “occasional skeletons or [cremations in the] small *ollae* found in the tombs.” These containers are precisely where we would expect to find the remains of lower status individuals, including women and sub-adults in this population.

In her important publication documenting 158 *fossa* graves and nine *pozzi* graves (N = 167), Cavagnaro Vanoni (2002: 375) notes that evidence for the presence of children is rare. She suggests that the 80-centimeter length of Tomb 6095, which was above and cut into T. 6070, plus the presence of an *aes rude*, indicate that this grave may have held the bones of a child (Cavagnaro Vanoni 2002: 375, 455–456, 463). The *aes rude* suggests a third-century BCE date. Unfortunately, neither bone nor teeth were recovered from Tomb 6070, which had been excavated prior to 1987. Cavagnaro Vanoni notes that the only other indications of possible children’s graves might be inferred from two small sarcophagi, both of which are more likely ash chests

used for adults.³

Thus, the significance of these “missing” children has been recognized since the initial studies. Children below 5.5 years of age were not yet admitted to the status of “adults” in their community, and therefore they were buried in their own cemeteries (Becker 2007; also 2005b, 2011). In fact, this different mode of burial can be used to resolve different periods of time as well as to distinguish cultural boundaries, as between Romans and Lucanians (Becker 1982a, 1996a, 1996b, 1997b, 2006).

4. Interpretive Problems: Biological Evidence for Genetic Continuity or Cultural Change

Etruscologists need to pose specific questions regarding the bones in Etruscan tombs and, like Cavagnaro Vanoni, to utilize the data from them in cemetery reports. Entire cemetery publications have been devoid of any reference to human bone (Becker 2005a). Careful recovery and storage of bones are the only ways to enable evaluations of age and sex to be made.

In recent years, archaeologists have made a few serious attempts to understand the origins and development of Etruscan society. Of considerable note is the material evidence for an apparent “shift” in Etruscan society during the period from 500 to 375 BCE. Giuseppe D’Amore, more specifically, locates the focal point of major changes in the material record at around 480 BCE (D’Amore, Pacciani, and Pezzulli 1999). How this shift relates to changes in social organization is not made clear, but the date suggested provides a pivotal point for examining any number of aspects of life in Etruria before and after this time. D’Amore’s hypothesis also can be examined using the skeletal record. Becker (2002b: 693–697, esp. 697 n. 2), using Cataldi’s chronological divisions (“Urban Peak”: c.580–c.475 BCE, followed by “Years of Crisis”), notes the biological evidence for the reappearance of cremations at Tarquinia about this time (see also Cavagnaro Vanoni 1996). Data on changes in the stature of Tarquinians at that time also warrant review (cf. Becker Ms. B). Nielsen (1988–1989) believes that there may be evidence that indicates changes in family structure and social organization at Tarquinia between 500 and 450 BCE.

The common perception that technological change, as represented by shifts in, or new additions to, the material culture, is the basis of Nielsen’s inference. Cultural anthropologists consistently demonstrate that changes in functional material goods as distinct from ornamentation (or cultural markers?) may be accepted rapidly by the members of a culture, who either add them to materials at hand or make appropriate substitutions of new materials within the existing cognitive framework. Resistance to certain items occurs when

those materials carry cognitive loads that threaten cultural identity. For example, Native American cultures in the Delaware Valley, as all along the eastern coastal areas, rapidly accepted cloth, metal, firearms, and glass beads into their material assemblages. They diligently rejected all items of silver and gold for over two centuries (Becker 1992), because they were identified as emblems of European “culture.” The social organization of any society is vastly more resistant to change, requiring several generations to begin to shift, and needing three centuries to effect a complete transition (Murdock 1949). Technological change, therefore, can be identified as a precursor of social change at Tarquinia, but the interval required for shifts in social organization would be in excess of the 125-year period between 500 and 375 BCE that is discussed by D’Amore and his colleagues. However, material changes that took place during the first quarter of the fifth century would be archaeologically identifiable, and could reflect an alteration in the pattern of use in one or more aspects of Etruscan material culture.

Actual social structure and social change remain difficult to evaluate archaeologically, but there is some written evidence from Etruria that offers relative information (see Capdeville 2003). Efforts to resolve questions relating to heterarchy (a political structure that is non-hierarchical) among the Etruscans (see Becker 2002b) are particularly difficult to address. We have become accustomed to using data on changes in material culture, as seen in tombs, or biological variations as evidence for economic changes. These may be related since shifts in economics, or resource availability, are most commonly translated into food intake. The amounts as well as the types of foods used by the members of a culture, or of classes within a stratified society, are highly sensitive to economic change. In turn, better nutrition is rapidly reflected in changes in the stature of the generation maturing during a period of improved diet (Becker 1999b). Increases in wealth leading to increases in stature also may correlate with the wealth that went into the construction of larger and more elaborate tombs.

However, stature increases may apply only to the highest-status people in these tombs (Becker 2002a). The construction of large tombs with long entry corridors permits the inclusion of servants and other low-status individuals, in appropriate status-ranked locations such as on the tomb floor between the benches. Thus, the “average” stature of the people in a tomb may reflect the inclusion of members of a household from a range of status levels. Status differences for individual skeletons therefore can be predicted both by location and stature. Specific locations of skeletal remains are still afforded too little attention in the studies of these bones.

A lack of data from cultural anthropology also impedes progress in understanding or recognizing the meaning of the archaeological evidence. Use of terms such as “*tomba principesca*” to describe elite burials persists because the excavators have no anthropological equivalents with which to describe

such finds (that this continues today can be seen in the characterization of the deceased individuals found in the recently-discovered tomb at Tarquinia cited above). The possibility of a heterarchical structure, and its importance for Etruscan social and political organization (see Becker 2002b), is absent from the discussion.

5. DNA Studies and the Origins of the Etruscans

Early in my studies of human biology in Italy, I became interested in studying the effects of Greek colonization on the native populations in Sicily (Becker 1982b, 1985). This was during a period of increasing computer sophistication that offered improved techniques for conducting complex evaluation of large series of metric and non-metric skeletal traits. After years of searching, I realized that the basic data, in the form of adequate skeletal samples, simply did not exist in Sicily or anywhere else in Italy (cf. Lazer 2007). This problem continues to be an issue in Italy and elsewhere.

More than three decades after the CIBA symposium, another tool for identifying “racial groups” (Cherfas 1991: 1355) entered the picture. Studies of DNA were recognized as having considerable potential to answer many questions relating to human history, but among Etruscologists, the question of origins remained of interest. Despite the promise of these techniques, various problems continue to thwart the effective use of DNA in addressing these questions. Problems of contamination are foremost, but a host of other factors reveal most findings to be un-reproducible.

Several early papers investigating mitochondrial DNA set the tone. These even focused on southern Tuscany and the region surrounding Tarquinia (Bertorelle et al. 1996; Francalacci, Bertranpetit Calafell, and Underhill 1996; Francalacci 1997). An interesting array of papers considering the potential for DNA analysis in Etruscan research was assembled in an early issue of *Etruscan Studies* (1997). Leading this assemblage is G. Camporeale’s brilliant 1997 summary of the subject of Etruscan origins, in which he concluded that this was an indigenous population that had emerged from local “Villanovan” cultural roots. There follows a series of papers summarizing data that would be better provided at length. Unfortunately, these studies lacked clear statements about where the samples originated. In this regard, consideration should be given to locations where the skeletal evidence is questionable, such as at Poggio Civitate (Piazza et al. 2007). This is one of many sites at which standards of skeletal recovery and curation may be wanting. Some sets of results need more than usual scrutiny.

We remain confident that Etruscan studies can be augmented by various approaches involving the tools of molecular biology. Studies using new

technologies of DNA research could provide basic information on sex as well as clues to biological kinship. The absence of such findings reveals a great deal about both the failings in the methods and the goals of the research (Becker 1999c). For this reason, the use of DNA studies is expanding throughout Italy (cf. Becker 2002d: 61–63), with a particular focus on Tuscany, where A. B. Chiarelli (University of Florence) has long stimulated cutting-edge research in human biology.

Before continuing my analysis of DNA research, it is important to acknowledge the reviews of these studies published by Jean Turfa (2006) and Phil Perkins (2009). These provide landmark summations of the various DNA studies that are relevant to Etruscan populations. My conclusions are in complete agreement with theirs, and I can add to them only through my familiarity with the recovery (or lack thereof) and preservation of the skeletal remains purported to have been the sources of the DNA utilized in the studies. These early studies found high variability in the “control region of mitochondrial DNA” and interpreted this as supporting immigration. But from what sites and to which periods of time were the samples derived? These studies uniformly suffer from a failure to employ any kind of double-blind mechanisms. In addition, the absence of the basic data on exactly which specific skeletons were tested, from a region in which I am familiar with the skeletal “populations” available for study, is of particular concern. Furthermore, the absence of a basic listing of sample data from these “studies” prevents replication of the research and the establishment of programs that could verify or negate the conclusions reached. The absence of any orderly program to further these studies suggests that the findings are random, if not fatally flawed. This is also suggested by the apparent abandonment of further research in this vein. Now that we have a number of DNA studies from Etruscan Italy, we can trace a trajectory that appears to be going nowhere.

The findings of the study by Cristiano Vernesi and colleagues (2004) provide data that may be of use, both in method and conclusions. They identified 80 skeletal samples from a series of sites spanning the seventh to the third centuries BCE, but were forced to eliminate 50 of them for various reasons. The remaining 30, ultimately reduced to 28, derived from seven sites across almost the entire range of Etruscan influence. Two sites produced one sample each, neither of which could be assigned a date. The authors concluded that this array of individuals is as genetically variable as the modern Tuscan population. Conversely, despite the range of time and space variables, they found no significant heterogeneity in their sample, leading to the conclusion that they shared a single mitochondrial gene pool. As Turfa (2006) points out, the extensive trade and intermarriage documented on Etruscan tombstones, along with the late dates of the skeletons used in this study, almost guarantee a mixed population. The Vernesi team generously made available this sample

for further research.

A re-analysis of 28 of the specimens from Vernesi's study published by Malyarchuk and Rogozin (2004) questioned the integrity of the DNA tested. If this disparate population originated as immigrants, why were the earlier arrivals not compared with their descendants? How do these findings relate to those of scholars seeking to delineate DNA sequences within Turkey and relate these data to European evidence (see Comas et al. 1996)? How do the Etruscan data relate to the findings of Salas et al. (1998) whose efforts are aimed at delineating the genetic margins of what is considered to be "Europe"?

Efforts to support the "immigration" theory by the examination of the bones of the DNA of the cows raised by the Etruscans (Pellecchia et al. 2007) are even more interesting. Animal bones may be the only subset of archaeological materials in Etruria traditionally of less interest than their human remains. I am even more skeptical of the availability of records relating to these materials than I am of data on the latter. In short, the research that I envisioned as answering my questions on the biological impact of Greek colonization in Sicily (see Vona et al. 2001) has not been possible due to a lack of basic skeletal collections (see Becker 2002a).

The "Etruscan" papers all differ sharply from studies that seek to identify diversity among specific and identified populations of a single period (e.g., Corella et al. 2007). More controlled research has been conducted with European populations (e.g., Brandstätter et al. 2008; also Richards et al. 1996a, 1996b). Most of the Etruscan DNA articles suffer greatly from random selection of "available" material, which results in a *mélange* of data representing a vast area and extremely wide temporal variations. All of these studies also ignore the vast numbers of slaves held by the elite (see Briggs 2003), as if this subject were the dirty little secret of the ancient world. In the Etruscan realm, as elsewhere in antiquity, these slaves would have contributed greatly to genetic diversity. Searching for the genetic structure of individual "households," as represented by the many people within and around major tombs in Etruria, might prove both more useful, and scientifically valid, than efforts to tie Etruscan society to some fictional population in ancient Lydia.

Above all, the absence of well-recovered skeletal samples forms the primary problem with applying DNA analysis to questions such as Etruscan "origins." When scholars conducting a study of Etruscan DNA need to gather stored bones from "six different necropoleis" in Tuscany to put together a sample of bones from 27 people for study (Trei 2006) one gets a sense of the poverty of data available. Trei's subsequent reference to "different population scenarios" – that is, those containing a "small (25,000 females) or large (300,000 female)" population – can be sharply contrasted with the numbers of Etruscan skeletons available from all of Etruria over a period of 1000 years. DNA studies have failed to be applied to, let alone answer, some of the fundamental

questions that have been posed regarding the people of Etruria. Rather, these DNA studies seem to exist in a realm free from archaeological data. In addressing “big” questions, such as Etruscan origins, DNA studies reveal the weaknesses in this line of research. Four issues hamper these projects. Contamination is the most obvious. Failure to conduct blind research is a second. Concealment of sample origins renders reproduction of the experiments impossible. Finally, as with too many research programs of which I am aware, political maneuvering makes the entire process pointless.

Applications of these new methods of analysis to questions regarding tomb use at Tarquinia should reveal that these “family groupings” included non-kin as well as resident slaves, perhaps from beyond Etruria. DNA research also may confirm my hypothesis (1993: 39) that the woman buried in Tomba 6262 at Tarquinia had married into this population from another city (see Bartoloni 1988; also Arnold 1988). Moreover, the possibility that Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa (Becker 2002d) and a woman who may have been her cousin were participants in “female exchange” (Swaddling and Prag 2002) has also been considered. Many other questions relating to the actual inhabitants of these large burial chambers, who all together were the residents of these Etruscan towns and cities, still depend on basic archaeological research. Skeletal remains must be recognized as providing information of value: to this end, their specific contexts must be recorded, and the materials must be collected appropriately and adequately curated. Then, all of this information must be made available to scholars concerned with answering questions about the lives, deaths and burials of these ancient inhabitants of Etruria.

Recent studies of founder effects on Native American genetic diversity (Hunley and Healy 2011; Raff et al. 2011) have refined the methods by which human population dispersals, settlement patterns, and other interactions have influenced regional population histories. The application of these methods of study to better-defined skeletal populations in Etruria may go a long way to complementing other studies aimed at defining the Etruscan people. In Tarquinia, in particular, questions of sample size and experimental design, as well as a disregard for archaeological contexts and dates, leave the results of the early studies of Etruscan DNA less than satisfying. There is only one Etruscan city where a major effort was made to encourage recovery and careful storage of human bones. But even the extensive study of human skeletons at Tarquinia – a city from which we have the best-preserved collection of Etruscan remains – reveals that the basic evidence for understanding their population is still quite limited.

Jacobo Moggi-Cecchi et al. (1997), in a very traditional odontometric study, point out how little information we have on the teeth of this interesting population. Their effort recognizes that, as of 1997, except for the situation from Chiusi where some 30 skeletons may be known, excavations at most sites have very few skeletons (one or two at the most) and many have no

conserved remains. This situation is all the more peculiar since one of the more interesting features of Etruscan society was their use of ornamental dental pontics. We need to view this phenomenon through a review of dental health at Tarquinia.

Elsewhere I have discussed the relatively high concentration of dental appliances found at Tarquinia (Becker 2002c; also 2000). These gold ornaments, only worn by women, are rarely identified in the archaeological records, but they must have been concentrated in the tombs of the highest-status, or perhaps wealthiest, individuals. These large tombs were looted years ago (cf. Becker 1999d). The wealthy Etruscans in these tombs, and the population as a whole, had relatively good dental health. Dental decay and molar loss tend to be concentrated in the population after age 50, with gradual loss of anterior teeth correlating with people in their 60s and later. Incisor loss was rare. Thus, the ornamental application of these oral ornaments required the evulsion (i.e., the deliberate removal) of one or both central incisors to create a location for the bridge. This ornamental technology was later applied by the Romans in the construction of dental appliances that replaced missing teeth, or simply stabilized or held in place teeth that had loosened due to periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is common in many populations after age 40. The movement of teeth is accelerated with any dental loss, such that molar loss initiates a cascade of problems in the mouth.

The slow collection of data and the gradual accumulation of new perspectives that is central to the scientific process operate within a very small community of scholars. Whether it be herbal cures for cancer or Etruscan origins, the public retains traditional views regardless of the “evidence” amassed by scholars and shared through a literature of limited circulation that is entirely unknown to and unwanted by the public. Thus, a new book on the Lydian origins of Etruscan origins (e.g., Magini 2011) is sure to sell many more copies than any of the scholarly tomes of recent years. Similarly, DNA specialists are more likely to find support for unlikely, but popularly-known theories, than to search for methods of inquiry that are more in keeping with the scientific method. The use of publicists to convey the meanings of supposedly academic findings (e.g., Trei 2006; also Achilli et al. 2007) reinforces popular beliefs. The large numbers of authors working with Achilli is impressive, yet they cannot locate a significant skeletal sample and their results remain unimpressive.

6. Conclusions

A seven-year program to study the human skeletal remains recovered from Etruscan tombs excavated at Tarquinia was initiated in 1987 in cooperation with Maria Cataldi of the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Etruria

Meridionale. Data from the skeletons of 200 individuals recovered during this unique project provide significant direct evidence for the biology of these people and for detailed information regarding the ways in which the people of Tarquinia buried their dead during the sixth to first centuries BCE. Of particular note is the apparently greater numbers of males found in large tombs at the site. The apparently unequal sex ratio is a result of gendered differences in the use of cremation by the Tarquinians. Adult females at Tarquinia were cremated at a higher rate than males. In addition, female *ossilegia* (gathered cremated remains) often were placed in perishable containers made of wood, skin or cloth. The decay of these containers further confounds the recovery of evidence for female remains placed within Tarquinian chamber tombs.

Also noted in these tombs are the extremely low numbers of sub-adults and complete absence of children below the age of five and a half years. These findings regarding burial customs provide insights into household dynamics and social organization in ancient South Etruria. The special cemetery areas, or possible residential locations, for these children have yet to be discovered (but see Becker 2005b).

Over the past decade archaeological studies focusing on questions relating to gender have made important contributions to the reconstruction of interesting aspects of a variety of cultures. By focusing specifically on women and their roles within an ancient society, scholars have been able to elicit information important to the understanding of gender in specific contexts. In the classical world, the artistic as well as the written record has provided visual means of studying women and their roles within their society. Therefore the archaeology of gender as a specific focus has not been seen as either a new or an innovative approach. That said, we might note that a number of modes for evaluating gender in archaeological contexts applied outside of the Mediterranean area might be used profitably in Italian contexts. The art historical and epigraphic evidence relating to women in Etruscan tombs has raised a number of questions that may be answered through studies of the biological evidence and the use of anthropological models. The apparent disproportionate numbers of women in Etruscan tombs may be rectified using skeletal evidence that reveals expected gender-related status differences within Etruscan households. These differences are mirrored in the deposition of the remains of women in Etruscan tombs, at least at Tarquinia, in contexts less likely to have been identified as bones and recovered for analysis. Modern excavation techniques conducted by members from multidisciplinary teams are essential to the recovery of data from any context. This is particularly true in the case of large chamber tombs with multiple burials. The results will provide data revealing sex ratios more consistent with predicted numbers based on biological norms.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Nineteenth-century studies of Etruscan human skeletons focused entirely on adult skulls, in the belief that comparative morphology would reveal specific population differences and allow the “origins” of these people to be traced (Nicolucci 1869). This trend continued well into the twentieth century. A major shift in Etruscan skeletal studies began with a long-term program of curation and study begun at Tarquinia (1987–1994) under the direction of Dr. Maria Cataldi and supported by the office of the Soprintendenza per Etruria Meridionale. These studies led to a series of papers that examined health and stature, status differences, and the roles of women and children at Tarquinia, with implications for Etruria in general (Becker 1990, 1993, 1997b, 1999b, 2002b). Further questions regarding status differentials within “Etruscan” populations have been raised by Robb et al (2001) using a population from Pontecagnano for their focus (cf. Becker 1995b). A proposal to develop a “research project on the population biology of ancient Etruscans” (d’Amore et al. 1996: 159) also included methods that might be used to explore Etruscan origins. The results of this long term “multidisciplinary research project” are anticipated. Efforts to utilize DNA to decode Etruscan origins, generally

believed to be an *in situ* development, have been sharply contradictory (Turfa 2006). On the utility of DNA in archaeological of death and burial generally, see Collins et al. 2009 and Bramanti 2013

Notes

- 1 Serra Ridgway's (1996) important review of the grave goods from 173 tombs in the Fondo Scataglini area of Tarquinia, an area from which no skeletal material was collected, provides clues regarding the containers used for cremations of women (see Becker 2005a).

At Tarquinia at least one cremation has been identified that was placed in a leather or cloth bag and hung on the tomb wall. The unusual scatter of burned human bones from this container was identified in the tomb by M. Slaska and verified by anthropological inspection during a rare visit that I was permitted to make into a tomb during the process of excavation. Unconfirmed is whether that *ossilegium* was recorded and the bones recovered.
- 2 The cremated remains of older children commonly were placed in perishable containers, or added to existing containers within a tomb, such as the cremated 12 year-old child with the 38 year-old woman in T. 6255 (Becker 2002b: 694; cf. Becker 2001a).
- 3 Clive Davison's (2000) findings from Romano-British cemeteries are of considerable value in decoding the data from "urban" Tarquinia and related cemetery sites. The range of status differentials expected in and around tombs at urban Tarquinia creates a number of possible confounding factors relative to "normal" populations. At Tarquinia, the wide range of variations in burial containers, possible status specific locations within a tomb and outside of it, and other urban possibilities all provide mechanisms for emphasizing gender differentials in assigned status, but these variables operated more strongly in urban areas where class stratification was more sharply evident.

CHAPTER 14

Language, Alphabet, and Linguistic Affiliation

Rex E. Wallace

1. The Etruscan Language

Introduction

The word “Etruscan” is used to refer to the language spoken and written by the inhabitants of Etruria in the period before Roman expansion. It was spoken and written also by Etruscans who settled in the Po Valley, in Latium, and in Campania, and by Etruscans who were engaged in commercial endeavors at emporia scattered throughout the Mediterranean.

Texts – all but one in the form of inscriptions – are identified as Etruscan by their linguistic characteristics, that is to say, by features of noun and verb morphology, by the phonological composition of the word-forms, and to a lesser extent by features of orthography and alphabet (see [Sections 3](#) and [4](#) below). Even so, the classification of texts as Etruscan is not always clear-cut and the assignment of some to the Etruscan corpus is controversial (Cassio 1994; Watkins 1995: 42–45).

The oldest text in the Etruscan language, the inscription on the so-called Jucker vase from Tarquinia (Ta 3.1)¹ dates to c.700 BCE. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the inhabitants of Villanovan sites in Iron Age Etruria spoke a prehistoric form of the language, and that the inhabitants of sites in Middle and Late Bronze Age Etruria did too. Claims of an eastern origin for the Etruscan language, though popular today, remain unsubstantiated (see text 7.18 below).

Etruscan texts span a chronological bridge of 700 years and two phases of linguistic development. Old Etruscan refers to texts dated to between 700 and 450 BCE, while Recent Etruscan refers to texts dated after the mid-fifth century. A sound change that deleted vowels in medial syllables, the so-called vowel syncope, serves as the line of demarcation. The latest texts in the corpus are the bilingual epitaphs from Chiusi and Perugia in Etruria (CI 1.1221, Pe 1.211, Pe 1.313), and from Pisaurum in Umbria (Um 1.7). They belong to the final quarter of the first century BCE.

Literacy

Discussion of literacy in the Etruscan world amounts to little more than informed speculation. As will be seen in [section 4](#), the Etruscan texts that have survived are inscriptions on durable material, and they belong to a limited set of common epigraphic types, e.g., funerary, votive, dedicatory inscriptions, etc. More important, this evidence was recovered in large part from burials, not from domestic contexts, public spaces, or workshops. As a result the evidence does not provide us with the full range of documentary material that must have been written by Etruscans. Texts written on perishable material did not survive. But despite the nature of the evidence, we have no reason to think that the Etruscans used writing for purposes that were substantially different than other Italic peoples, including the Romans.

It is tempting to speculate about who could read and write and at what level, but, once again, the evidence does it permit us to reach any meaningful conclusions about the percentage of the population that was literate or how far down the social ladder literacy reached at any period of Etruscan history. However, if we adopt a conservative approach and suppose that the spread of reading and writing in Etruria followed a trajectory similar to that proposed by Harris (1989) for Rome, we would calculate that a low percentage of the population – beginning with members of the elite classes – would have been literate in any meaningful sense of the word, even at the end of the Etruscan period.

Language Death

The Etruscan language died because its speakers shifted to Latin as their primary, and eventually only, means of communication. Etruscans chose to abandon their native tongue as a consequence of losing their political and military autonomy. But there were incentives to speak Latin too. Fluency in Latin provided them with the means to access the economic and social networks necessary for accommodation and advancement in the Roman polity.

The death of Etruscan was a gradual process; it was characterized by a period of time covering the third to first centuries BCE during which the social contexts in which the language was spoken became more and more restricted. Although the language became extinct, the Etruscans as a people did not.

2. The Origins of the Alphabet in Italy

The Greek Alphabet in Italy

Euboean Greek colonists from the towns of Eretria and Khalkhis introduced writing to the inhabitants of Italy. These colonists settled at Pithekoussai, and then a few decades later founded the town of Cumae on the mainland. Inscriptions recovered from these settlements, which date to the full eighth century BCE, reveal a vibrant immigrant community, some of whose members were not only literate but were well-schooled in Greek poetic culture (Bartoněk and Büchner 1995; Watkins 1995: 41–5).

An inscribed flask discovered in the tomb of a woman buried at Gabii, a settlement in northeastern Latium, is the earliest evidence of alphabetic writing in Italy. The flask dates to c.770 BCE (Holloway 1994: 112). If the writing is Greek, as many claim it to be, it is the earliest document in the Greek alphabet anywhere in the western Mediterranean (Watkins 1995: 36–39).

The Etruscan Alphabet

Etruscans who engaged Euboean Greek colonists, and became conversant in Greek and in Greek writing, were responsible for adopting and then adapting the alphabet to write Etruscan. Two orthographic innovations distinguish Etruscan writing from Greek. The first innovation is the spelling of the sound /k/ as >c<, >k< or >q<, depending on the following vowel letter.² The Etruscan *u*-participle *kacriqu* /kakriku/ illustrates this orthographic practice. The second innovation is the spelling of /f/. This sound is not found in ancient Greek and so Etruscan scribes had to devise a spelling for it. They decided upon a combination of two letters, >v< and >h<; either order, >vh< or >hv<, was acceptable. The word *θavhna* “cup” /t^hafna/ and the name *θihv&c.dotbl;aries* “Thifarie” /t^hifaries/ illustrate the spelling. These innovations guarantee that the alphabet was borrowed and modified to write Etruscan no later than the end of the eighth century BCE. After the alphabet was adopted, it spread rapidly throughout Etruscan communities in Etruria and beyond.

The Etruscan Alphabet as a Source for Other

“Italic” Alphabets

Etruscans served as a conduit for the spread of the alphabet to non-Etruscan speakers. Contacts with Italic-speaking settlements along the Tiber were strong during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE and as a result, the alphabet fanned out along these corridors of communication. Umbrians, Faliscans, Latins, and Sabines adopted the alphabet soon after it appeared in Etruria. Etruscans also carried the alphabet beyond the Arno and the Apennines. Tribes inhabiting the Po valley and the sub-alpine regions of Italy were writing as early as the sixth century BCE. Inscriptions in Cisalpine Celtic, Venetic and Raetic, all written in Etruscan-based alphabets, confirm the central role of the Etruscans in the spread of the alphabet outside of Etruria.

3. Etruscan Alphabets and Orthography

Alphabetic Reform and Regional Etruscan Alphabets

Early adopters of the alphabet lived in the southern Etruscan towns of Caere, Veii, and Tarquinia. The alphabet spread from these sites in a northerly direction via elite corridors of communication and commerce. Once members of a community adopted the art of writing, they were free to alter the inherited shapes of letters and to change orthographic practices to suit their own tastes. Regional differences in writing developed in Etruria soon after the alphabet spread.

By the sixth century BCE, three areas of orthographic diversity had developed in Etruria – roughly, southern, central and northern Etruria. It was based on two orthographic features: (1) the spelling of the sibilant consonants, /s/ and /ʃ/, and (2) the spelling of the voiceless velar stop, /k/. In the southern Etruscan communities of Caere and Veii, scribes settled on the letter *gamma* >c< to spell the sound /k/; *kappa* >k< and *qoppa* >q< fell from use. The same orthographic practice was adopted in central Etruria. In northern Etruria, scribes preferred the letter *kappa* >k< to spell /k/; *gamma* and *qoppa* became moribund. The spelling of the sibilants was more complex, as [Table 14.1](#) illustrates.

Table 14.1 Regional Spelling of the Sibilants (/s/ and /ʃ/) and the Velar Stop (/k/).

Regions	/s/	/ʃ/	/k/

Northern (Chiusi)				
Central (Tarquinia)				
Southern (Caere and Veii)				

At Caere and Veii, the dental sibilant /s/ was represented by three-bar *sigma* >s< and the palatal sibilant /ʃ/ by four-bar *sigma* >ç&c.acute;<.³ In central Etruria, a three-bar *sigma* spelled the dental /s/, but the letter *san* >σ&c.acute;< was used for the palatal /ʃ/ sound. In northern Etruria, the spelling was reversed. *San* >σ< spelled /s/ and *sigma* >ś< spelled /ʃ/. This diversity of spelling had its origin in the graphic over-differentiation of the spelling of /k/ (too many letters to write one sound) and the graphic under-differentiation of the spelling of the sibilants (one letter to spell two sounds). In the first case, the complex system whereby /k/ was originally spelled by three letters, >c<, >k<, or >q<, was simplified. In the second case, a graphic distinction was created region by region in order to express a phonological distinction between the sibilants in the sound system.

The alphabet borrowed from Euboean Greeks had 26 letters, and its various manifestations are listed in [Table 14.2](#).

Table 14.2 Etruscan Alphabets.

Alphabet 1: seventh century BCE (AT 9.1)	a b c d e v z h θ i k l m n ŝ o p σ q r s t u ſ φ χ
Alphabet 2: sixth century BCE (Ta 9.1)	<i>a [c e v z] h θ i k l m n [p σ q r s] t u φ χ</i>
Alphabet 3: sixth century BCE (Ru 9.1)	<i>a c e v z h θ i k l m n p σ q r s t u φ χ f</i>
Alphabet 4a: third century BCE (AH 9.1)	<i>a c e v z h θ i l m n p σ r s t u φ χ f</i>
Alphabet 4b: 550–500 BCE (Pe 9.1)	<i>a e v z h θ i l k m n p σ r s t u φ χ f</i>

These data indicate that the oldest Etruscan alphabets preserved all of the letters inherited from the Greek, even though the letters *beta*, *delta*, *samekh* (transcribed here as *ŝ* and *omicron* were never used to write Etruscan texts (Alphabet 1). A century later, alphabetic reforms eliminated unused letters from the series (Alphabet 2). At roughly the same time, a new letter, standing for the sound /f/, was added to the end of the series (Alphabet 3). By 500 BCE, the number of letters had been further reduced to 20 by eliminating either *kappa* and *qoppa* (Alphabet 4a; southern and central Etruria) or *gamma* and *qoppa* (Alphabet 4b; northern Etruria).

Retrograde >e< at Cortona

Changes in the pronunciation of diphthongs in Recent Etruscan created new sounds that were not distinguished in writing. For example, the diphthong /aj/, originally spelled >ai<, changed to a simple vowel, a phonetically long [e:], before the approximant /w/. Most Etruscan scribes spelled the “new” vowel by making use of the existing letter >e<. At Cortona, however, a clever scribe distinguished this vowel sound from the original *e*-vowel in the sound system by reversing the direction of the vowel letter >e< (retrograde >e< is transcribed as *ê*). By doing so, he introduced a “new” letter into the writing system (Agostiniani and Nicosia 2000: 47–52).

Punctuation

The oldest Etruscan inscriptions were written *scriptio continua* without any division between the words, and this style of writing survived in Recent Etruscan. Punctuation in the form of two or three vertically-aligned points separating words appeared in the seventh century BCE, and remained an optional feature of writing until Etruscan ceased to be written. However, the most common form of word-punctuation, especially in Recent Etruscan, was a single point placed at mid-line level.

Occasionally, different forms of punctuation were used within the same inscription for functions other than separating words, for example, to mark the end of a clause (AT 1.105) or an inscription (Cr 2.131), or to frame the beginning and the end of an inscription (Pa 2.7).

The division of inscriptions into “pages,” “paragraphs” or sections is more rare, but noteworthy examples exist. The epitaph of the Claudii (Cr 5.2), written in the fourth century BCE, was divided into three sections, each separated from the preceding by a double horizontal line. Double horizontal lines also set off the ten major sections of the *Tabula Capuana* (II. TC), a mid-fifth century BCE incised terracotta tile found at Santa Maria Capua Vetere in Campania. Vertical lines, on the other hand, divided the columns of the *Liber Linteus*, a ritual calendar, into twelve “pages,” while blank spaces of two or three lines divided the text into sections. Editorial marks in the shape of a Z also set off sections of the *Tabula Cortonensis* (III AC = Co 8.3), a bronze tablet with writing on both sides, while the *Cippus Perusinus* (IV CP = Pe 8.4), a legal agreement between the Afuna and Velthina families of Perugia, was divided up into “paragraphs” by leaving a space at the end or the beginning of a line.

Another form of punctuation is found on inscriptions incised by scribes working at the sanctuary of Portonaccio at Veii. Letters beginning and ending orthographic syllables that did not have CV or CRV structure were marked with points (e.g., *mama.r.ce.a.punie* “Mamarce Apunie” Ve 3.5). This orthographic practice, which is known as syllabic punctuation, may have

originated as a teaching or spelling aid in scribal schools (Pandolfini and Prosdocimi 1990).

Direction of Writing

Etruscan texts were written almost exclusively in a right-to-left direction. Deviation from this norm is found in Old Etruscan inscriptions recovered from Caere, Veii and environs, but this practice spans a relative short period of time, from c.650 to 575 BCE (see inscription 7 in [Section 4](#)). Recent Etruscan inscriptions, particularly those composed within second and first centuries BCE, sometimes adopted left-to-right direction of writing, in deference to the direction used to write Latin (e.g., CI 1.196, CI 1.254, CI 1.421, CI 1.487, etc.).

4. Etruscan Texts

Inscriptions

The Etruscan texts that have survived are, with a single exception to be discussed below, inscriptions – that is to say, texts incised, painted or stamped on objects made of durable material (ceramic, metal, and stone). They belong to epigraphic categories that are well attested throughout the ancient Mediterranean. The total number in the corpus is over 10,000 (Meiser 2014).

Sixty words purported to be of Etruscan origin are found in the works of classical authors – Varro, Suetonius, Strabo, and others – and in the *Lexicon* of the late-Greek grammarian Hesychius (fifth century CE). Unfortunately, the citations are not always trustworthy. Some words are Greek (δέα “goddess,” κάρρα “goat”). Words that are demonstrably Etruscan, such as the word for “god” (*aesar*, αἷσοι), are sometimes altered to conform to the morphological and phonological templates of Greek or Latin, thus depriving them of much of their utility for the study of Etruscan. But the citations have provided some gems too. The names of several months have proved to be important additions to the lexicon and have contributed to the analysis of sections of Etruscan ritual texts.

Funerary inscriptions make up a high percentage – over 60 percent – of Etruscan texts. They range in date from the seventh century to the first century BCE, with a majority belonging to the third–first centuries. As is to be expected, epitaphs have minimal linguistic structure, most often conveying

the name of the deceased (see inscription 1) and his or her familial relations (see inscription 2). Inscriptions on the tomb facades of the Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis outside of Orvieto offer the syntax of proprietary texts (inscription 3) (Figure 14.1) (for the syntax, compare inscription 7 below).



Figure 14.1 Funerary inscription (*mi aveles sipanas*) on the architrave of a tomb, c.500 BCE.

From the necropolis of the Crocifisso del Tufo, Orvieto. Photo: R. Wallace.

1. *velθur tarχna[s]* (Cr 1.42; 300–200 BCE)

“Velthur Tarkhnas”

2. *avle . tarχnas . larθal . clan* (Cr 1.10; 250–225 BCE)

“Avle Tarkhnas, son of Larth”

3. *mi aviles sipanas* (Vs 1.39; c.500 BCE)

“I (am the tomb) of Avile Sipanas.”

Funerary inscriptions from the *Ager Tarquiniensis* and from Vulci can be more expansive. They may include detail about the deceased’s lineage, his age, and the public and religious offices to which he was appointed, as noted in inscriptions 4–5.

1. *[al] eθnas : arnθ : larisal : zilaθ : tarχnalθi : aμce* (AT 1.100; 300–100 BCE)

“Arnth Alethnas, (son) of Laris, was magistrate in Tarkhna.”

2. *tute : larθ : anc : farθnaχe : tute : arnθals | haθlials . ravnθu : zilχnu : cezpz :*

purτ&c.acute;vana : θunz | lupu : avils : esals: cezpalχals (Vc 1.93; 250–200 BCE)

“Larth Tute, who was generated by Arnth Tute and Ravnthu Hathli, held the

magistracy seven (?) times, the *purτshvana* once. He died at the age of 72.”

A few examples commemorate the construction of tombs or their renovation. The most famous was incised on a column in the central chamber of the tomb of the Claudii at Caere (inscription 6).

1. *laris . av|le . laris|al . clenar | sval . cn . ζ&c.acute;uθi | ceriχunce |*
(Cr 5.2; 400–300 BCE)

apac . atic | saniζ&c.acute;va . θui . cesu . | clavtieθurasi

“Laris (and) Avle, sons of Laris, built (had built) this tomb while living. Both father and mother, the *saniζ&c.acute;*- (?), (were) laid to rest here. For members of the Clavtie family.”

Old Etruscan inscriptions of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE are proprietary (7), dedicatory (8), and votive (9) in content. They follow simple, formulaic syntactic patterns. Artisans’ signatures (see inscription 10), which were sometimes incised or painted on vases, are syntactically simple too. Nevertheless, a not inconsiderable number of inscriptions from this period defy classification and interpretation (e.g., Cr 0.1 and Cr 0.4).

1. *mi χunθeruza χpuriaς mlakaς* (OA 2.75; 625–600 BCE)

“I (am) the small pyxis of the beautiful Spuria.”

2. *mini kaisie θannursianna⁵ mulvannice* (Cr 3.14; c.600 BCE)

“Kaisie Thannursiannas gave me (as a gift).”

3. *itun turuce venel atelinas tinas cliniiaras* (Ta 3.2; sixth century BCE)

“Venel Atelinas dedicated this (vase) to the Dioskouroi.”

4. *mini zinace aranθ arunzina mlaχu mlacasi* (Cr 6.2; 625–600 BCE)

“Aranth Arunzina made me, a beautiful (vase) for a noble (person).”

“Longer” Inscriptions

The Etruscan inscriptions cited above are all short, the case with most extant examples of Etruscan writing. In fact, the list of inscriptions with more than

50 words has seven entries. The two Etruscan Pyrgi Tablets ([Figure 14.2](#)), which have 36 words and 15 words respectively, may be added to this list (see inscription 16).



Figure 14.2 Tablet I with inscription in Etruscan, c.500 BCE. Gold.

From Pyrgi. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, inv. no. Provv.PS.S.S1.
Photo: Universal Images Group/Art Resource, NY.

The longest document in Etruscan does not, in a technical sense, count as an inscription. The *Liber Linteus* is a manuscript written in ink on a sheet of linen. The text was written in 12 columns, which were divided into “pages” by means of vertical lines. Each column had 34 lines of writing, yielding a total of 1350 word-forms. If words that are repeated and inflectional forms of the same word are not counted multiple times, the total is reduced by about two-thirds.

The *Liber Linteus* functioned as a ritual calendar. Sacrifices to be made and prayers to be offered to Etruscan divinities are organized by month and day. For example, the sacrifice to Nethuns begins as follows:

1. *celi . huθiθ . zaθrumiθ . flerχva . neθunθl . θucri . θezeric* (I. LL VIII, 3–4)

“On September twenty six, victims must be offered (?) and sacrificed (?) to Nethuns.”

This linen book survived by sheer luck. After the text was copied, probably in the third century BCE, Etruscans who migrated to Egypt to escape Rome’s military reach carried the book with them. At some point – we do not know when – the book fell into disuse and was acquired by an Egyptian family who cut it into strips and used it to wrap the corpse of a deceased woman.

The *Tabula Capuana* was incised on a terracotta tile; it was found at Santa Maria Capua Vetere in Campania and dates to the middle of the fifth century BCE. The bottom of the tile is so badly damaged that the words in the central portion of the text field are not legible. 62 lines of text, divided into ten “chapters,” survive. The word-count is 390, but the total number of words, allowing again for repeats and inflectional forms of the same word, is around 200. The *Tabula Capuana*, as the excerpt in inscription 12 illustrates, is also a ritual calendar and is structured like that of the *Liber Linteus* (12).

1. *isveitule ilucve apirise leθamsul ilucu cuiesχu perpri* (II. TC II, 8)

“On the festival of the Ides, in April, the *cuieskhu* rite of Lethums must be performed (?).”

In 1992 a bronze tablet with writing on both sides, now known as the *Tabula Cortonensis*, was turned over to authorities in Cortona (Figure 14.3). The inscription, which was published in 2000, generated considerable excitement because of its length and content. The text is 40 lines long, with 32 lines of writing on Side A and 8 on Side B. There are 206 word-forms. The text is a legal agreement between Petru Shceva and members of the Cushu family over the return of land. The text begins with the following statement:

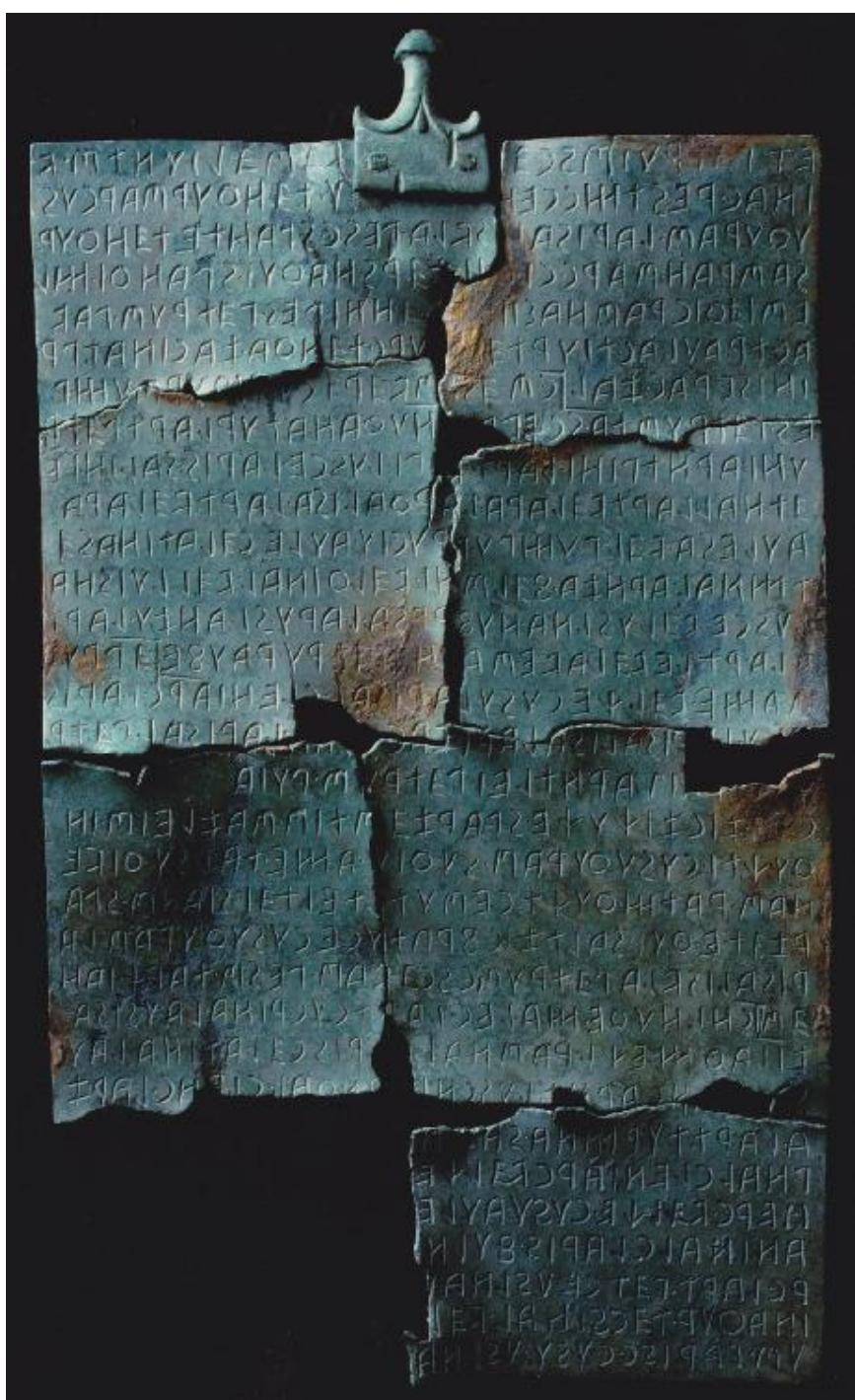


Figure 14.3 The Cortona Tablet (*Tabula Cortonensis*), c.250–200 BCE. Bronze.

From Cortona. Cortona, Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca e della Città di Cortona. Photo: © Luciano Agostiniani.

1. *e{.}t . pētruīś ścēvēś ēliuntś . v|īnac . restmc . ceñ(vacat)u . tēnthur śar . cuś|uθuraś* (III. AC, 1 = Co 8.3)

“Thus both the *vina* and the *restm* (were) ceded (?) by Petru Shceva, the *eliun*, in the amount of 10 acres (?) to the Cushu family.”

The *Cippus Perusinus*, the fourth longest Etruscan text, is also a legal agreement. It is a copy of a contract between the Afuna and Velthina families of Perugia over property rights. 24 lines of text were incised on the front of a stone cippus; another 22 lines appear on one of the sides. The total number of word-forms is 128.

1. *auleī . velθinaś arznal cl|enī . θii . θil ścuna . cenu . e|plc . felic larθalś afuneś* (IV. CP a, 9–11 = Pe 8.4)

“As regards the water, the rights (?) to water (were) granted by Larth Afuna, both *epl* and *feli*, to Aule Velthina, the son of Arznei.”

The Santa Marinella inscription (Cr 4.10) is a bronze plaque with writing on both sides. Two non-fitting fragments of the bronze survive, both badly damaged. 40 words and parts of another 40 survive. The plaque, which dates to the fifth century BCE, was found in the sanctuary of Punta della Vipera.

The lead tablet of Magliano (Av 4.1) too is an opistograph. It is oval in shape; words were incised in a spiral from the outer edge running in toward the center. The tablet was incised about 450 BCE. It is a religious text of some sort to judge from the mention of Cautha and other divinities.

The image of Laris Pulenas holding a book scroll in his hands was sculpted on the cover of his sarcophagus. His epitaph was incised on the scroll. The sarcophagus and text date to the first half of the second century BCE. The inscription thus has the distinction of being the most recent Etruscan text of any length. It records the genealogy of Pulenas as well as his political and religious activities. The initial sentences read as follows:

1. *l(a)ṛis . pulenas . larces . clan . larθal . papacs | velθurus . nefts. prum̃s. pulē&c.acute;ś . larisal. creices | an cn . z|χ . ne&c.acute;θśrac&c.dotbl; . acasce .* (Ta 1.17, 1–3)

“Laris Pulenas, son of Larce, grandson (?) of Larth, great-grandson (?) of Velthur, descendent (?) of Laris Pule Creice (‘the Greek’). He put together (?) the document on haruspicy.”

Three inscribed gold plaques were recovered in 1964 during excavation of the Etruscan sanctuary at Pyrgi. Two plaques ([Figure 14.2](#)) were inscribed in Etruscan, the third in Phoenician. The latter, although not a translation of the Etruscan, provides a guide for interpretation. The plaques describe the dedication of a cult building to the divinity Uni (Phoenician Astarte) by Thefarie Velianas, the king of Caere. The first sentence of plaque one is cited in (16).

1. *īta tmia icac he|ramaśva vatiēxē | unialastrēs* (Cr 4.4; c.500 BCE)
“This shrine and this sanctuary were requested (?) by Uni.”

5. Language

Morphological Classification

Etruscan is classified as an agglutinating language in the manner of Turkish and Hungarian. Etruscan nouns best illustrate this type of morphological structure. Inflectional suffixes generally represent a single meaning or grammatical feature. For example, Etruscan *aiseraσ* (gods) had three constituents: a stem *aise-* “god,” a plural suffix *-ra*, and an genitive ending *-σ*.

Morphology

Nominal forms in Etruscan appear as a morphologically simple root, e.g., *clan* “son,” *seχ* “daughter,” *ais* “god,” *ziχ* “document, writing, book,” *θi* “liquid, water,” *sren* “image,” or as a morphologically complex stem, e.g., *σ&c.acute;uθ-i* “resting place, tomb,” *θi-na* “jar (for liquid).” The inventory of noun and adjective forming suffixes is not understood in all respects, but the form and function of those cited in Table 14.3 are secure.

Table 14.3 Noun and Adjective Suffixes.

Suffix	Uses	Examples
-za	forms nouns indicating diminutive size forms diminutives of names	<i>leχθumuza</i> “small oil flask” <i>larza</i> “Larth junior”
-thur (-tur)	forms nouns indicating membership	<i>clavtiethur</i> “members of Clavtie family” <i>nuθanatur</i> “a group of witnesses”
-c	forms adjectives from nouns	<i>zamθic</i> “of gold” <i>neθσ&c.acute;rac&c.dotbl;</i> “of a haruspex”
-aθ	forms agent nouns from noun and verb stems	<i>zilaθ</i> “one who governs”

-na	forms adjectives from noun stems, including family names	<i>σ&c.acute;uθi-na</i> “of the tomb” <i>apa-na</i> “of the father” <i>larice-na</i> “the Laricena family”
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Nouns inflected for number and case. There were two numbers (singular and plural), and four oblique cases (genitive, pertinentive, ablative, and locative). The uninflected form of the noun, referred to here as the nominative / accusative form, served as the base of the paradigm. The suffix of the locative was -i. The remaining oblique cases had two sets of inflectional suffixes (informally called endings): *s*-endings and *l*-endings. The *s*-endings were the following: genitive -s /s/, pertinentive -si /si/ and ablative *-is (the vowel -i of the ending combined with the stem-final vowel). The *l*-endings were: genitive -al (Old Etruscan -a), pertinentive -ale, and ablative -als (Old Etruscan -alas). Representative forms are cited in [Table 14.4](#).

Table 14.4 Case Forms of Nouns and Adjectives.

Case forms	Examples
nominative/accusative	<i>špura</i> “community” <i>zilχ</i> “magistracy” <i>meθlum</i> “city” <i>clan</i> “son” <i>avil</i> “year” <i>mlax</i> “good” <i>tmia</i> “shrine”
genitive	<i>σpurai</i> “community” <i>clens</i> “sons” <i>meθlumeσ</i> “city” <i>avils</i> “year” <i>mlakas</i> “good” <i>larθal</i> “Larth” <i>zilacal</i> “magistracy” <i>tmial</i> “shrine”
pertinentive	<i>clensi</i> “son” <i>mlacasi</i> “good” <i>larθale</i> “Larth”
ablative	<i>špures</i> < * <i>špurais</i> “community” <i>šparzeσ</i> < * <i>šparzaioσ</i> “tablet” <i>meθlumeσ</i> < * <i>meθlumeioσ</i> “city” <i>larθals</i> “Larth”
locative	<i>zilci</i> “magistracy” <i>meθlume</i> < * <i>meθlumei</i> “city” <i>θii</i> “water” <i>zati</i> < * <i>zatii</i> “club”

The inflection of a noun in the singular, that is to say, whether it took the *s*-endings or the *l*-endings, was not predictable based on the nominative/accusative stem (but see [Section 5](#): The Onomastic System). A few nouns could be inflected with both types of endings without any difference in meaning. Consider, for example, the genitives *cilθσ* “fortress (?)” and *cilθl*. Why this should be the case is not clear.

Nouns belonged to one of two semantically determined classes. The semantic feature [± human] distinguished the two (Agostiniani 1992: 54–55). Thus, *clan* “son” belonged to the [+ human] class, while *avil* “year” belonged to the [– human] class. The two classes were distinguished formally in terms of their inflectional endings. Nouns classified as [+ human] formed their plural with an *r*-suffix ([Table 14.5](#), Section A); nouns that were [– human] formed their plural with the suffix *-χva* and its variants *-cva* and *-va* ([Table 14.5](#), Section B).

Table 14.5 Etruscan Plurals.

Singular	A. Plural formed with an <i>r</i> -suffix
<i>clan</i> “son”	<i>clenar</i> “sons”
<i>ais</i> “god”	<i>aiser</i> “gods”
<i>papals</i> “grandchild”	<i>papalser</i> “grandchildren”
	B. Plural formed with the suffix <i>-χva</i> and its variants <i>-cva</i> and <i>-va</i>
<i>avil</i> “year”	<i>avilχva</i> “years”
<i>cilθ</i> “fortress”	<i>cilθcva</i> “fortresses”
<i>zusle</i> “ <i>zusle</i> -offering”	<i>zusleva</i> “ <i>zusle</i> -offerings”

The two classes were further distinguished by inflection and syntax. Nouns that inflected with the *r*-plural took the *s*-endings, while nouns that inflected with the *χva*-plural took the *l*-endings. When numbers modified nouns, the plural suffix was obligatory for nouns of the [+ human] class, but optional for nouns that were [– human] (e.g., *ci clenar* “three sons,” *ki aiser* “three divinities,” but *ci zusle* “three *zusle*-offerings,” cf. pl. *zusleva*).

Adjectives inflected for case, but no evidence has been adduced to show that they inflected for number, though one would expect that substantivized adjectives would take plural inflection under the appropriate syntactic conditions.

Etruscan had two demonstrative pronouns (*italeta* “this, that” and *icaleca* “this, that”), an indefinite pronoun (*ena* “anyone, anything”), a determiner (*- (i)σ&c.acute;a* “the”), and two relative pronouns (*an* and *in*). The determiner, which was an enclitic, inflected like the demonstratives and almost certainly had demonstrative function in prehistoric Etruscan. The demonstratives *ita* and *ica* could be accented or unaccented. When unaccented, they were

enclitic, and, in Recent Etruscan, were phonologically reduced in form (see Table 14.6).

Table 14.6 Etruscan Pronouns.

Case	Demonstrative pronouns (Old Etruscan Forms are on the left of the slash and Recent Etruscan forms on the right)	First person pronouns
nominative	<i>ita/eta, ta</i>	<i>ica/eca, ca mi</i>
accusative	<i>itan, etan, tn</i>	<i>ican, ecan, ecn, cn mini, mine, mene</i>
genitive	<i>tas, tala/etas, tla</i>	<i>cas/ecs, cla –</i>

Personal pronouns are attested for the first (*mi*) and third person (*sa*), and perhaps also for the second (*un*), but the identification of this form as a second pronoun is controversial (Rix 1991).

The inflection of pronouns differed from that of nouns and adjectives in several respects. Pronouns had an inflectional ending (*-n, -ni*) to mark the direct object of a verb. The pronominal *l*-genitive ending was *-la*, rather than *-l*. And finally, the pronominal genitive admitted both *s*- and *l*-suffixes without any functional distinction between the two. Partial inflectional paradigms of demonstratives and of the first person pronoun are given in Table 14.6.

The words for the numbers 1–6 are: *θu(n)*, *zal*, *ci*, *σ&c.acute;a*, *maχ* and *huθ*. The words for 7–9 are *cezp-*, *nurφ-* and *semφ-*, but we are not sure which word matches up with which number. At this point the best guess is that *cezp-* is “seven,” *semφ-* “eight,” and *nurφ-* “nine.” The word “ten” is *σar*, and the word “twenty” is *zaθrum*. Multiples of 10 over 20 were formed by addition of *-alχ* to the numerical stem (e.g., *ci-alχ* “thirty,” *še-alχ* “forty,” *muv-alχ* “fifty,” *cezp-alχ*, *semφalχ*, and *nurφalχ* “seventy” to “ninety”). The remaining numbers were compound formations. The first six numbers between 10 and its multiple were coordinate compounds, the second constituent being the word for 10 or its multiple (e.g., *huθzar* “sixteen,” *ci zaθrum* “twenty-three,” and *maχs semφalχls* “eighty-five (?)”). The last three numbers between 10 and its multiple were formed by adding the suffix *-em* to the first constituent. Thus, the word “seventeen” was *ciem zaθrms*, which may be translated as “three subtracted from twenty.”

Multiplicative adverbs were formed from the stems of numbers by addition of the suffix *-z*, e.g., *cezpz* “seven times (?)” and *citz* “three times.”

Views of the Etruscan verb system – its forms and their constituent structures – as well as their meanings are more diverse than the views of the nominal

system, but important areas of scholarly consensus exist (cf. Wylin 2000; Belfiore 2001; Rix 2004; Wallace 2008; Willi 2011). These are described below.

Etruscan verbs were inflected for tense, voice, and mood, but not for person and number. Past active verbs had the suffix *-ce* (e.g., Old Etruscan *turuce* “dedicated,” *muluvanice* “gave,” *amake* “was” and *zinace* “made”; Recent Etruscan *turce*; *zince*; *lupuce* “died” and *amce*). These forms contrast with verbs such as *nuθe* “observes,” *male* “sees,” *tur* “dedicates,” and *ame* “is,” which are unmarked for tense and so may cover functions ranging from present to future. Past passive verbs had the suffix *-χe* (e.g., Old Etruscan *zixuxhe* “was engraved, designed, written” and *menaxhe* “was prepared (?)”). The verbs *tenine* “is held” and *cerine* “are constructed” are best construed as passives, as inscription 17 demonstrates; the verbs are unmarked for tense.

1. *eca : σ&c.acute;uθic : velus : ezipus | clensi : cerine* (Vc 1.87; third century BCE)

“This (monument) and tomb (belong to) Vel Ezpus; they are constructed by his son.”

The uninflected verb root or stem served as the imperative (e.g., *tur* “dedicate,” *σ&c.acute;uθ* “put,” *trin* “speak” and *nunθen* “invoke”). The imperative *capi* “take, steal” is found in so-called anti-theft inscriptions (18).

1. *mi χulixna cupe.s. .a.l.θ.r.nas .e.i minipi c&c.dotbl;api | mini thanu* (Cm 2.13; fifth century BCE)

“I (am) the bowl of Cupe Althr&c.ringbl;na. Don’t steal me. *Thanu* (?) me.”

Modal forms of the verb ended in the suffixes *-a* and *-ri*. Verbs with the suffix *-a* had jussive function (e.g., inscriptions 19 and 20). Verbs ending in *-ri* referred to activities that were obligatory, as can be seen with the function of *σucri*, *θezeri*, and *perpri* in inscriptions 11 and 12 (above [section 4](#)).

1. *ein θui ara enan* (Cl 0.23; fifth century BCE)

“No one should put/make (?) anything here.”

2. *raxθ tura hexsθ vinum* (I. LL IV, 9)

“Let him place (?) (it) on the altar (?) while pouring (?) wine.”

Verbs could be formed directly from verb roots, but they could also be made from nominal or participle stems by means of suffixation. The suffix *-(v)ani-* (Recent Etruscan *-n*), having causative or factitive function, is well-attested in Old Etruscan (e.g., *mulu-vani-ce* “gave as a gift” and *zix-(v)ani-ce* “composed a document about”). Recent Etruscan verbs such as *zilaxnuce* “held a magistracy” were also derived from nominal stems by means of an *n*-suffix; but in this case, the meaning was not factitive.

The Etruscan verb system also included participles derived from verb roots and verb stems. The most common formation was made by adding *-u* to roots (e.g., *mul-u* “given as a gift; gift” or *lup-u* “dead”) or past tense stems (e.g., *aliq-u* “given (?)”), without their being, as far as can be determined, any functional difference between the two formations. Participles in *-θ*, formed to roots and stems, referred to activities that were contemporaneous with that of the main verb (e.g., *trin-θ* “speaking,” *nunθen-θ* “invoking,” and *hexθ-θ* “pouring (?)”). Other participles were more complex morphologically, their constituent structure being difficult to assess (e.g., *acnanas* “having produced (offspring)” and *acnanasa*, both from the root *ac-* “to make, produce;” *svalθas* “living,” from the root *sval-* “to be living;” and *zilaxnθas* “having held/holding a magistracy,” from the stem *zilaxn(u)-* “to hold a magistracy”).

Etruscan did not have prepositions, but, as is to be expected of an agglutinating language, it did have postpositions. The postposition *-ri* “on behalf of” was affixed to locative case forms (e.g., *špureri* “on behalf of the community”). The postposition *-θi* “in, on” and its variants *-θ*, *-ti* and *-te* were also added to locative forms; they indicated location (e.g., *hupnineθi* “in the funerary niche”). When affixed to place names, this postposition governed the genitive case (e.g., *tarchnalθi* “at Tarkhna” (Van Heems 2006: 51–56)).

Morphosyntax and Syntax

The syntactic functions of the inflected forms of nouns, adjectives, and pronouns are well-established. The nominative/accusative form served as the subject of transitive and intransitive verbs, and as the object of transitive verbs. This form was also used to indicate duration of time (e.g., *ci avil* “for three years”). The genitive case indicated possession (see inscription 7) and other forms of nominal dependency, e.g., familial relationships (see inscription 2). It also marked the indirect object in votive dedications (e.g., inscription 9). The pertinentive case indicated the person to whom something was given or for whom an activity was performed (Agostiniani 2011). In passive constructions, it marked the agent of an action (see inscription 17). In some noun phrases, the pertinentive case functioned as a locative of a genitive (e.g., *zilci Ceisiniesi v* “in the magistracy, the (magistracy) of Vel Ceisinie,” or *serturiesi* “in the (workshop) of Serturie”). The ablative case was used to indicate origins (e.g., *larθals* “deriving from Larth”) or to designate a part of a whole (e.g., *šin aišer fašeiš* “take (?), O gods, (some) of the salsa (?)”), but it too could stand for the agent in a passive construction (see inscription 5). The locative indicated place where and time when, as well as the instrument, means or manner by which an activity was accomplished.

The default order of the major constituents in Etruscan sentences was S(ubject) O(bject) V(erb). Orders other than SOV involved the movement of

constituents, typically to the front of the sentence, for reasons having to do with emphasis. The placement of the accusative case pronoun in first position is common in inscriptions of the “speaking text” variety. In these cases the focus is on the artifact, which “speaks” to the viewer (see inscriptions 8 and 10 in [section 4](#)).

SOV order is in keeping with the arrangement of other constituents in Etruscan sentences from a typological perspective (Agostiniani 1993). Genitive phrases, pronominal adjectives, and numbers tend to be placed before the nouns they “modify” (e.g., *larθal clan* “son of Larth,” *ita tmia* “this shrine,” *ci avil* “for three years”), while ad-positions follow the nouns they govern (e.g., *špureri* = *špure* + *-ri* “on behalf of the community”). Adjectives, insofar as can be determined, typically follow their nouns (see the noun phrases in inscriptions 7 and 12 in [Section 4](#)).

Adjectives agreed with their nouns in case. Demonstrative adjectives and the determiner did so as well. Evidence indicates that the determiner also agreed with its noun in number. An example is given below (inscription 21). In the noun phrase *cušúθuraš larišališvla*, the word *larišališvla* is parsed as *larišal-išvla*; *-išvla* is the genitive plural of the article. It agrees with its noun *cušúθuraš* in case and number.

1. *špa|rzête. θui. šalt. zic. fratuçe. cušúθuraš. la|rišališvla. pêtrušc. šcêvaš* (III. AC, 18–19 = Co 8.3)

“Here, on this tablet (?), (the Shians) incised the contract (?) of the Cushu brothers, the (sons) of Laris, and of Petru Shceva.”

Etruscan had two coordinate conjunctions, *-kal-cal-c* “and” and *-um/-m* “and, but.” The former coordinated phrases and clauses (see inscription 16). The latter did, too, but it could also have adversative function. Recent investigation suggests that it may have had discourse functions as well (Pocchetti 2011). Both conjunctions were enclitic. Etruscan also permitted asyndetic coordination of noun and verb phrases (see inscription 6).

The selection of the relative pronoun depended on the semantic class of the antecedent (Agostiniani and Nicosia 2000: 100). If the antecedent phrase had the feature [+ human], the relative word was *an* (see inscription 5); if the antecedent phrase had the feature [- human], then the relative was *in*. In the sentence cited below (inscription 22), the relative pronoun *in*, which is the subject of the verb phrase *šúθiu ame*, refers back to the ablative phrase *šparzêštiš sazleiš*.

1. *cên. zic. zixuxe. šparzêštiš. sazleiš. in | θuxti. cušúθuraš. šúθiu. ame* (III. AC, 18–19 = Co 8.3,)

“This document was copied from the wooden (?) tablet (?) which is kept in the home (?) of the Cushu brothers.”

The syntax of subordinate sentences is not very well understood, although several subordinators have been identified: *nac* “when, after, since (?),” *iχ* “just as,” and *iχnac* “how” introduced adverbial clauses (see inscription 23), while *ipa* “that” introduced noun clauses (see inscription 24).

1. *eca : sren : | tva iχna|c hercle : | unial cl|an θra{:}σ&c.acute;ce* (Vt S.2; fourth/third century BCE)

“This image shows (?) how Hercle became (?) the son of Uni.”

2. *eθ fanu lautn precuσ ipa murzua cerurum ein heczri* (Pe 5.2, 2–3; second century BCE)

“Thus, the family Precu declared (?) that neither the urns nor the *cerur* (?) were to be emptied (of their contents) (?.)”

Phonology

The Old Etruscan phonological inventory had 21 sounds: 17 consonants and 4 vowels. The consonants, as outlined in [Table 14.7](#), may be represented schematically based on the features of place and manner of articulation.

Table 14.7 Etruscan Consonant System.

	Labials	Dentals	Palatals	Velars	Glottals
Stops	p	t		k	
	p ^h	t ^h		k ^h	
Fricatives	f	s	ʃ		h
Affricate		t ^s			
Nasals	m	n			
Liquid		l			
Rhotic		r			
Approximants			ʝ	w	

The consonant system had two series of voiceless stop sounds. The first series was un-aspirated /p, t, k/, the second, aspirated /p^h, t^h, k^h/. There were four fricatives /f, s, ʃ, h/ and one affricate /t^s/, all voiceless. The sonorant consonants consisted of two nasals /m/ and /n/; a lateral liquid /l/; a rhotic /r/; and the approximants /j/ and /w/. These sounds were voiced.

The Old Etruscan vowel system consisted of two front vowels, one high /i/ and one mid /e/; a low, back, un-round vowel /a/; and a back round vowel /u/. In addition to these simple vowels, there were several diphthongs: /aj/, /ej/, and /aw/. The diphthongs /uj/ and /uw/ entered the system as a result of borrowing.

Etruscan also had a stress accent, which was placed on the vowel in the initial syllable of a word. Syllable-initial accent affected the quality of the vowels in

successive syllables and led eventually to their loss. This happened in two stages. In Old Etruscan, medial vowels lost their distinctive quality, in all likelihood changing to a mid-central vowel [ə]. This accounts for the fluctuation in the spelling of medial vowels during the sixth and early fifth centuries, as can be seen if we compare the spellings of the personal name Avile: *avile*, *avale*, *avule*, and *avele* (all phonetically [awəle]). By the middle of the fifth century, [ə] was lost, sometimes leaving behind complex consonant clusters and causing inter-consonantal nasals, liquids and rhotics to assume vocalic function, e.g., *avile* > *avle* /'awle/ “Aule,” *turuce* > *turce* /'turke/ “dedicated,” *ramuθa* > *ramθa* /'ramθa/ “Ramtha,” but *menerva* > *menrva* /'menr&c.ringbl;wa/ “Menerva,” *vestricin[as]* > *veštrcnaσ* /'weštr&c.ringbl;knas/ “Veshtr&c.ringbl;knas.”

Vocabulary

The inscriptions in the Etruscan corpus cover a limited range of topics. As a result, the vocabulary that has survived, and for which meanings can be determined, belongs to small number of semantic areas: religion, kinship, death and burials, political offices, months of the year, styles of pottery and so forth. Moreover, the meanings of a significant number of the vocabulary items in our inventory, which might provide us with a broader view of the Etruscan lexicon, cannot be determined from the inscriptions in which they are found. Thus, while we know the names of various types of vases, we do not know the words for everyday vocabulary, food items, types of furniture, styles of clothing, or personal relationships.

Native Etruscan words are well represented in the area of familial relationships. The words that have been identified are: *clan* “son,” *sex* “daughter,” *apa* “father,” *ati* “mother,” *ruva* “brother,” *papals* and *tetals* “grandchild” on the father’s and mother’s side respectively, and *puia* “wife.” The words for “grandfather” and “grandmother” are compound formations: *apa nacna* and *ati nacna*.

The largest segment of Etruscan vocabulary, coming as it does from the *Liber Linteus* and the *Tabula Capuana*, is religious in nature. A selection of words from these sources includes: *ais* “god” (*aiser* pl.), *farθan* “genius, spirit,” *faœ* “salsa (?)”, *fler* “offering (?)”, *flere* “divine spirit,” *zivas* “living,” *zusle* “victim,” *θezeri* “must be sacrificed,” *nunθen* “invoke,” *raχ* “altar (?)”, *sacnica* “brotherhood (?)”, *šuθ* “place, put,” *trin* “speak,” and *turza* “[small] offering.” The words *vinum* “wine” and *cletram* “carrier,” which figure prominently in offerings and ritual actions, are loanwords from Umbrian. But many words attested in these texts are *hapax legomena*: their meanings cannot

be determined.

Several terms for ceramic objects come from ancient Greek: *κῶθων* “drinking vessel” → *qutum*, *λήκυθος* “oil flask” → *lextum(uz)*, *πρόχους* “jug” → *pruxum*, and *κυλίχνη* “small cup” → *χulixna*. The phrase *aška eleivana* refers to an “askos for olive oil.” The adjective *eleivana* has, as its stem, the Greek word *ἐλαίφα*. In inscription OA 3.15 *elaivana* (note the spelling difference) is used substantively; it refers to a flask for oil (*mi m{ : }laχ mlakana larθus elaivana* “I (am) the beautiful oil flask of the noble Larthu.”). A few native formations are also attested. For example, Etruscan *spanti* (plate) is derived from *span*, the word for “plain, flatland.” *θina* “jar [for liquid]” is the native word for a container for liquid; it is derived from *θi*, the word for “water” or “liquid.”

The Onomastic System

Etruscan shared with its Italic neighbors in central Italy an onomastic system that had the family name (*gentilicium*) as its fundamental unit. The family name was inherited by freeborn offspring from their father at birth. The personal name (*praenomen*) was the given name. In Old Etruscan, there were a rather large number of personal names, but those in common use steadily decreased over time. In Recent Etruscan no more than a dozen personal names were in common use (e.g., *avle*, phonologically *laulel*, *arnθ*, *vel*, *velθur*, *larθ*, *laris*, *marce*, *σ&c.acute;eθre*, for men; *velia*, *θana* / *θania*, *θanχvil*, *larθi*, *ramθα*, *σ&c.acute;eθra*, and *fastilfastia* for women). In addition to the personal name and the family name, the basic onomastic phrase in funerary inscriptions often included the patronymic, which was the father’s personal name inflected in the genitive case (see inscription 2 in [Section 4](#)).

Funerary inscriptions of the third and second centuries BCE, particularly those in the northern Etruscan towns of Chiusi and Perugia, expanded upon the basic onomastic phrase by including one or more of the following: a *cognomen*; a metronymic (the family name of the deceased’s mother); and a gamonymic (the family name of the deceased’s spouse). The *cognomen*, which served to distinguish branches within an extended family, was also inherited.

Inscriptions with four or five onomastic constituents are not uncommon at Chiusi. Inscriptions 25 and 26, both epitaphs, are examples.

1. *lθ : peθna : aθ : titial : ścire* (CI 1.147, c.300 BCE)

“Larth Pethna Shcire, (son) of Arnth (and) Titi”

2. *θana : peθnei | ściria : tutnaśa | ḥelial : σec* (CI 1.148, c.300 BCE)

“Thana Pethnei Shciria, the (wife) of Tutna, daughter of Heli”

The names of slaves and freed persons are also attested in epitaphs. In the

case of slaves, the onomastic phrase consisted of the slave’s personal name, often Greek in origin, and the family name of her/his owner. The nouns *lautni* “freedman” and *lautniθa* “freedwoman” accompanied the names of freed slaves, as inscription 27 illustrates.

1. *apluni : cum|eres : lautni* (CI 1.121, second century BCE)

“Apollonius, freedman of Cumere”

The inflection of names was more regular than the inflection of nominal forms. The final sound of the stem determined whether the inflectional endings were of the *s*- or *l*-type. Stems ending in vowels were inflected by means of the *s*-endings. Stems in *-l* and *-r* took the *s*-endings too, but the ending was preceded by the vowel *-u* (e.g., genitive *vel-us* “of Vel”). Stems in dental consonants took the *l*-endings. Feminine family names, which had the suffix *-i*, also followed *l*-type inflection. Forms of names are cited in [Table 14.8](#), with Old Etruscan names listed on the left of the backslash.

Table 14.8 Case Forms of Personal and Family Names.

Case Forms	Personal Names	Family Names
nominative/accusative	<i>larice/larce</i>	<i>nuzarnai</i>
	<i>ramaθa/ramθa</i>	
	<i>venel/vel</i>	
genitive	<i>larices/larces</i>	<i>nuzinaia</i>
	<i>ramaθas/ramθas</i>	
	<i>venelus/velus</i>	
	<i>larisa/larisal</i>	
	<i>larθial/larθial</i>	
pertinentive	<i>laricesi</i>	
	<i>licinesi</i>	
	<i>ramaθasi</i>	
	<i>venelusi</i>	
	<i>larisale</i>	
	<i>larθiale</i>	
ablative	<i>ramθes</i> (stem <i>ramθa</i>)	<i>veleθnalac</i>
	<i>arnθals</i>	<i>tarnes</i> (stem <i>tarna</i>)

6. Linguistic Affiliation

Proto-Tyrrhenian

Etruscan is linguistically related to two sparsely attested languages. The first is Lemnian, the language of the pre-Greek inhabitants of the island of Lemnos in the north Aegean (Agostiniani 1986; de Simone 1986 and 2009). The second is Raetic, a language spoken in the sub-Alpine regions of eastern Italy (Rix 1998; Schumacher 2004).

The linguistic features shared by these three languages are found primarily in the domain of inflection, though a few cognate lexical items can be cited (e.g., Lemnian *avis* “year” and Etruscan *avils* (both genitive case); Lemnian *σ&c.acute;ialχveis* “forty” and Etruscan *σ&c.acute;ealχls* (both genitive case); Raetic *zinake* “dedicated (?)” and Etruscan *zinace* “made”). The linguistic relationship posited on the basis of morphological and lexical similarities compel us to view Etruscan, Lemnian and Raetic as descendants of a common parent language, which is referred to as Proto-Tyrrhenian (Penny 2009).

How the geographical distribution of these languages is to be explained is another, more perplexing, question, and one that has been – and still is – the subject of considerable debate. It is possible that prehistoric Etruscan and Raetic speakers moved west to their current locations from a “homeland” in the eastern Aegean, perhaps in the Early Bronze Age. This view corresponds to the Eastern Origins “theory” in its current form. Another possibility is that prehistoric Lemnian speakers moved eastward from a “homeland” in Italy. This theory corresponds most closely to the autochthonous view of Etruscan origins.

Both scenarios are plausible, but we cannot prove which one, if any, is right because they must be projected so far back in time. So, while the linguistic evidence makes it clear that Etruscan, Lemnian and Raetic belong to the same family of languages, it cannot provide insight into the question of the Etruscans’ origins.

7. Conclusion

Etruscan is a dead language, and yet the interpretation of its inscriptions and the description of its linguistic structure constitute a vibrant field of investigation. Each excavation season yields new epigraphic evidence that sheds light on old grammatical problems and creates new ones for our consideration. For example, the publication of inscription Cr 1.197 from the “Tomb of the Inscriptions” at Caere has reignited the debate about function of *ipa* as a subordinating conjunction (Facchetti 2009). And the publication of the inscribed bucchero *kyathos* from Santa Teresa di Gavorrano (Vn 3.2) initiated a study of the palatalization of /s/ in northern Etruscan dialects (Eichner 2012: 69–77). The investigation of the language, although it has not

reached the sophistication of our study of the Indo-European languages of ancient Italy, is at a point where it must be regarded as a legitimate object of rigorous scientific inquiry.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Taken together, the articles of Cristofani 1978a and 1978b provide an illuminating introduction to the origins and development of the Etruscan alphabet and to the spread of literacy in the period before Roman expansion. The article by Maggiani 1990 is the most important study of Recent Etruscan alphabets and orthography. The introduction by Weiss 2010 (particularly pp. 3–9) provides a lucid discussion of the methodological issues that may be used to analyze and interpret ancient texts. The articles by Meiser 2006 and

Rix 1997 are important because they illustrate how the method of parallel texts can be used to illuminate sections of “long” Etruscan inscriptions. Agostiniani 1997 provides an exemplary study of one area of the Etruscan vocabulary that is reasonably well-understood. Even so, he demonstrates that a more nuanced view is possible. Finally, Adiego 2005 offers a brilliant analysis of an important Etruscan inscription, a perfect marriage of linguistic and textual analysis.

Notes

- 1 Etruscan inscriptions are cited from Meiser 2014. Raetic words are cited from Schumacher 2004; Lemnian words are from de Simone 1986. The following epigraphic conventions are employed in inscriptions: Round brackets (*abc*) indicate characters omitted by the engraver, generally for the purpose of abbreviation; curly brackets {*abc*} indicate extra characters erroneously incised by the engraver; square brackets [*abc*] indicate characters which have been restored or which can no longer be read; angled brackets <*abc*> indicate characters omitted by the engraver and supplied by the editor; the underdot ȁ indicates a character that is damaged and/or is no longer clearly legible; the pipe | indicates a line-break.
- 2 Sounds in phonological transcription are placed within slanted lines; sounds in phonetic transcription are placed within square brackets. Sounds are transcribed according to the International Phonetic Alphabet. Letters of the alphabet are placed within arrows; >a< refers to the letter *alpha*.
- 3 Etruscan letters are transcribed according to the system set out in Wallace 2008: xiv–xvii. Sibilant sounds are transcribed as follows: three-bar sigma = *s*, four-sigma and multi-bar sigma = *ç*, and san = *σ*. The dental sibilant /s/ is represented as *s*, *ç*, and *σ*; the palatal sibilant /ʃ/ is marked with a diacritic over the sibilant character, thus, *ś*, *ç̣* & *c.acute*; and *σ̣* & *c.acute*;

CHAPTER 15

Bucchero in Context

Philip Perkins

1. Introduction

Bucchero is the modern name that archaeologists give to a class of ceramics that was produced in central Italy between the seventh and the fourth centuries BCE. Bucchero vessels take a wide variety of forms and have a black or dark gray color and a smooth reflective surface (Martelli 1994; Camporeale 2000; Naso 2004; Perkins 2007; De Puma 2013). Bucchero represents a distinctive part of Etruscan material culture and the story of this type of ceramic reflects the cultural and historical development of the Etruscan people in many ways. This chapter will use the concept of the “life cycle” to construct a form of biography for bucchero as a class of ceramic in order to place it in its wider cultural and historical context (Kopytoff 1986: 66–67; Hoskins 1998). My study starts with its production, moves on to its use and considers how it became a part of the archaeological record, and concludes by discussing how bucchero fits into the contemporary world.

2. Context of Production

Just like any other ceramic, the raw material for making bucchero is clay. Etruria is well endowed with clay deposits and the production of bucchero did not require clay with precise chemical properties. A more important quality was its purity: this could be achieved by washing freshly dug raw clay and then settling out the clay from the water to remove the larger impurities and obtain a relatively pure raw material. Other Etruscan ceramics that were in use at the time when bucchero first appeared (the second quarter of the seventh century BCE) used a raw material that was either less purified or was modified by the addition of minerals (grits, lime or organic material) that manipulated its characteristics when it was fired (fluxes) or its strength and malleability when the pots were being formed from the raw clay (fillers). These ceramics are known by the Italian term *impasto*, which encompasses a wide range of ceramic styles from quite rough and thick everyday vessels to fine, highly polished vases that are virtually indistinguishable from bucchero examples (Badoni 2000). Indeed, *impasto* and bucchero productions are very closely linked, and the earliest bucchero may be considered as a refined

version of impasto. Some scholars use the term “buccheroid impasto” to describe vases that share characteristics of impasto and bucchero; however, there is no clear-cut boundary between the two, with a continuum rather than a division between the two categories.

Impasto and bucchero also share techniques that were used to form and decorate the vessels. The earliest bucchero was made by hand, probably with the use of a slow potter's wheel. Once leather-hard, the partly-dried clay body was polished with smooth tools to burnish the surface. This created a compact and resistant surface that also had a characteristic reflective nature. On many vessels it is possible to see individual burnishing strokes on the surfaces, but on some of the very carefully polished examples, these tool-marks are impossible to see. This smooth surface was then often used as the background for decoration that was either incised or stamped using specifically prepared dies. In the southern part of Etruria, stamped decoration becomes rare in the last quarter of the seventh century but remains in use through the sixth century in more northerly parts and the Po Valley (for example, at sites such as Poggio Colla, Fiesole, Marzabotto, Bologna, Spina, and Forcello: Santocchini Gerg 2012: 224, fig.1). A distinctive form of stamping, shared with some impasto, is a pattern of dotted lines radiating from a single point and forming a semi-circular or wedge-like fan shape (Regter 2003: 21–53). The pattern, made with a toothed comb, was common in the central decades around the mid-seventh century. It is conventionally described as a fan, due to its resemblance to modern handheld folding fans, but it does not replicate any ancient Etruscan fan shapes. For this reason, J. Gran-Aymerich has suggested that the motif might possibly derive from Egyptian representations of a papyrus flower (1995: 49–50). This form of decoration was often accompanied by various incised lines and horizontal grooves, or impressions apparently made with twisted wire or cord, following a tradition found in earlier Italic ceramics. A more elaborate decoration is incision of freehand motifs such as friezes of animals, or on occasion, humans or animals molded in low relief. Some of the earlier handmade vessels are very elaborate and take on more sculptural forms with the use of ribbing, undulating surfaces, or plant and animal forms (Sciacca 2003).

Very rarely, bucchero has been found further decorated with gold leaf or colored paint (Gran-Aymerich 1995: 47, 65, pl. 3; Rastrelli 2000: 147 pl. 167), but these finishes are too infrequent to suggest that such elaboration was originally commonplace (when seen in museums, it is often the result of nineteenth century enhancements to make the decoration more visible). The polished surface of bucchero occasionally has a silvery surface sheen that is a byproduct of the firing process, but this is also rare, making it unlikely that the production of vessels that had a silver metallic appearance was a consistent aim of the potters (e.g., Perkins 2007: 87 no. 75).

During the third quarter of the seventh century, ceramic technology becomes

more sophisticated and the fast potter's wheel becomes the standard means of shaping vases. This is supplemented by various techniques for turning partly-dried vases on the wheel and the use of sharp tools to modify their profiles, a process that often produced inflections and carinations in the walls with sharp, angular edges. The technique is similar to turning materials such as wood or ivory on a lathe. This technological transformation is matched by a scaling up in the quantity of bucchero that was produced and a shift from individually crafted pieces to mass-produced series of near-identical vases with only limited decoration.

The vessels, once dried and decorated, were fired in relatively low-temperature kilns. There has been much debate and experimental reproduction of bucchero firing techniques. Impasto ceramics are typically fired in oxidizing or mixed atmospheres that produce dark red, brown or brownish gray vessels. Bucchero, however, is characterized by its black or very dark gray color that is produced in a reducing atmosphere where oxygen is kept out of the kiln, particularly when the vessels are cooling. It is possible that carbon (in the form of charcoal) was deliberately added to the clay used for bucchero to enhance its black color, but experimentation has shown that control of the firing atmosphere is the key variable in producing the black effect (Acconcia 2004; Cuomo Di Caprio 2007: 437–440; Deriu 2009).

Kilns for the production of bucchero have been reported in various places in northern Etruria (e.g., at Pisa, San Piero a Sieve, and Quartaia (Colle Val d'Elsa)) as well as in Campania (Acconcia 2004: 285), but unfortunately, none have yet been published and all are outside of the areas where the earliest bucchero was produced. As a consequence, the reconstruction of their manufacturing processes depends upon observation of finished bucchero vases and experimental archaeology. Pottery kilns from the Orientalizing period that have been excavated (e.g., at Poggio Colla (Perkins 2012: 151) and Trebbio (Ciacci et al. 2009)) are merely hollows cut into the ground, perhaps with a clay superstructure or a simple bonfire above to fire the vases. Such kilns may have been used for producing bucchero that was closer to the impasto end of the scale, but it seems probable that more sophisticated updraught kilns would have been necessary to provide the required control of the firing atmosphere to produce consistently black bucchero in large quantities (Acconcia 2004; D'Asti and Vidale 2004; Di Gennaro 2004; Vallesi 2004a, b; Perkins 2007).

Moving beyond technological aspects, the context of the production of bucchero is also defined by comparison with a broader spectrum of ceramics. The relationship between earlier handmade impasto and bucchero has already been mentioned, and bucchero also shares some basic shapes of bowls, plates, and jars with coarser utilitarian wares. Bucchero is therefore firmly rooted in the ceramic traditions of the late Iron Age in Latium and Etruria. Yet during the second half of the eighth century BCE, cultural contacts across the Mediterranean began to intensify, and Greek settlement at Pithekoussai and

Carthaginian settlement on Sardinia made contacts with the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean more frequent. At the same time, trade and exchange began to bring novel artifacts, cultural practices, and technologies into Etruria. These contacts had an impact on the development of material culture in Etruria and can be traced in both subtle and spectacular ways: bucchero, therefore, provides a case study of how a cultural milieu may be reflected in the changes in material culture.

From the late Bronze Age through the Iron Age (tenth–eighth centuries BCE), the biconical urn with a horizontal handle at its widest point is a distinctive artifact used for domestic purposes and to contain cremated ashes in burial pits. The same distinctive body shape, with vertical handles from the widest point to the rim – the amphora – is found in impasto and bucchero (Rasmussen type 1). The same basic shape, but with only one handle becomes a bucchero dipper (*attिंगitoio*) or jug (Rasmussen type 1), which has an equally long prehistoric pedigree. This same shape was adapted by artisans who produced a bucchero wine jug shape that blends features of the biconical Etruscan shape with a Phoenician narrow necked jug (Rasmussen *oinochoe* type 2). The artisans must have seen the original jugs made in silver, bronze, ivory/ostrich egg, and ceramic in Phoenicia or Cyprus (Rasmussen 2006: 76; De Marinis 2008). This jug develops, in turn, into a wide-mouthed wine flagon, which becomes one of the most distinctive and characteristic bucchero shapes (Rasmussen *oinochoe* type 3). Influences are also absorbed from Greek ceramics: horizontal bands and vertical rays around the lower body are taken from painted Protocorinthian wares and incised upon bucchero wine flagons, amphoras and cups. The shape of some wine flagons is further influenced by Protocorinthian ceramics and Rhodian bronze flagons, which have a more angular neck and a complex handle with discs (*rotelles*) covering the point where it joins the rim (Rasmussen *oinochoe* type 4). A further connection is provided by shallow, two-handled bucchero wine cups (Rasmussen cup types 1–3) which reproduce the shape of Corinthian and East Greek cups that were made with light-colored clay and decorated with dark-painted motifs. This web of interconnections is illustrative of the complex cultural mix of influences that typifies the Orientalizing period in central Italy and reveals the openness of Etruria to the Mediterranean world (see further, [Chapters 6, 7 and 26](#)).

These examples show how artisans producing bucchero drew from contemporary traditions in neighboring cultures, but bucchero also inspired artisans elsewhere. In Athens, for example, a later development of the amphora shape made by the potter Nikosthenes in black-figured ware copied an Etruscan shape (Rasmussen amphora type 1g), as did some carinated one-handled cups (Rasmussen *kyathos* type 1h) (Rasmussen 1985; 2006: 113–114). Carinated cups of various kinds were one of the most distinctive Etruscan shapes that had their origin in the Late Bronze Age. The chalice

shape, with a plain rim, sloping wall and carination, had many variants, with higher or lower base; one handle (*kyathos*) or two handles (*kantharos*); and a multiplicity of different forms of relief decoration, some impressed and others raised up. This shape also inspired Athenian potters to reproduce the Etruscan vessels. The distinctive Etruscan two-handled carinated wine cup, the *kantharos*, additionally became the attribute of the god Dionysos.

As well as being exposed to external influences, the artisans producing bucchero worked within social and artistic traditions that had a profound influence on the development of the ceramics they produced. Some of the earliest bucchero made at Cerveteri, for example, is exceptionally complex and elaborately decorated (Schiappa 2003). Various aspects of its form and production are closely related to artifacts made in bronze, precious metals and ivory. The relationship is so close that it seems likely that all of these artisans worked alongside one another to produce prestige items for the very highest levels of Etruscan society in the early to mid-Orientalizing period (Gran-Aymerich 1995). Bucchero, bronze and silver vessels also share some shapes of both Italic and Eastern Mediterranean derivation (e.g., East Greek cups, *kotylai*, chalices and *oinochoai*) and it is often assumed that the bucchero vessels copy the original metal shapes. However, the priority of metal types has not been firmly established (Regter 2003: 108–109) and research is hindered by the differential survival of metals and ceramics: the metal examples are extremely rare and they can be easily recycled, whereas the ceramic types are much more common as well as more durable. There is an unmistakable skeuomorphic relationship between some metal and some bucchero vessels: clay rivets or repoussé decoration, for example, occur on some bucchero vases. But it is less certain whether common design features – such as sharp carinations, which are simple to achieve in ceramic but difficult in sheet metalwork – originate in one medium or the other. What is more certain is that the material aesthetics, or style, of bucchero are shared across a range of media, implying that there were less rigid divisions between artisans working in different media than has been the case in more recent ceramic traditions.

In the same way as the shapes of bucchero display numerous connections with the wider Mediterranean context, decorative details can also reflect the broader cultural milieu of the Etruscans. Amphoras from the mid-seventh century with incised decoration of connected spirals, geometric designs and stylized animals recapitulate motifs familiar from the Iron Age. Later, in the last decades of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth century, vessels with an incised frieze of animals form a distinct group of bucchero vases (Bonamici 1974; e.g., Perkins 2007: nos. 12, 130). The animals share characteristics particular to Phoenician and Assyrian representations, and may be framed with Greek geometric motifs in a scheme that is reminiscent of Corinthian painted wares. As such, they provide an example of how Etruscan

artisans were fully engaged with the Orientalizing phenomenon, producing items for use by sections of society that were receptive and presumably appreciative of such external figurative styles. A further example is provided by the chalices supported by caryatids and strap-work that combine the Etruscan chalice shape with Near Eastern motifs and perhaps representations of Near Eastern deities (Brocato and Regoli 2009). In the sixth century, too, bucchero vases with relief decoration continue to reflect Corinthian motifs but now they also include figures with more Archaic traits, illustrating how the bucchero artisans were continually exposed to broader cultural currents that modified forms of visual representation in this period (see also [Chapters 24](#) and [26](#)).

3. Geographical and Economic Contexts

Although no production facilities have yet been identified, it is possible to identify the types of bucchero produced at different places by using formal characteristics (color, surface finish, chemical or mineral composition), the shape of the vessels, the style of the decoration, and their geographical find spot. However, it is not possible to assign all bucchero to specific production sites, or even regions of Etruria: it is only the presence of distinctive features that have been clearly associated with specific sites that make an attribution possible. Even with chemical analysis, such as neutron activation analysis, it is not always possible to differentiate, reliably, the various production centers, given the fundamental similarities between different clay sources in Etruria. Nevertheless, this is an area where future work will refine and increase our knowledge (Naso 1994).

The earliest bucchero production sites appear to be Cerveteri and Veii (Marchetti 2004), and it is at Cerveteri that the most elaborate and technologically advanced vessels first appear (Capecchi and Gunella 1975; Regter 2003; Sciacca 2003). Many of these early vessels are characterized by exceedingly thin walls (<3 millimeters), a quality that has led to the general use of the term *bucchero sottile* to describe these early wares. It is not yet possible to trace the full details of the spread of bucchero production but by the end of the seventh century, production was underway at most of the main Etruscan cities, with significant workshops in operation at Tarquinia (Locatelli 2004; Palmieri 2010), Vulci (Celuzza 2000; 2004), Orvieto (Tamburini 2004) and Chiusi (Del Verme 2000; Minetti 2000; Cappuccini 2011). Much bucchero production appears to have taken place in urban contexts, and most cities have an identifiable production of their own, for example at Vetulonia (Camporeale 1967; Gregori 1991), Roselle (Donati 1991; 1994), Populonia (Acconcia 2010; Grassini 2010), Pisa (Bruni 1998), and Rome (Rossi 2004; Van Kampen 2004). Those where a bucchero production has not been

securely identified are places that have not yet yielded extensive Orientalizing and Archaic period deposits (e.g., Volterra, Cortona, Arezzo, Perugia, and Fiesole). There are also limited indications of production at smaller sites in Etruria, such as Blera (Di Silvio, Di Silvio and Polozzi 2004) and Poggio Colla (Perkins 2012: 151). In addition, the important finds from Poggio Civitate (Murlo) (Berkin 2003) are distinctive enough to suggest that they may have been made at the site rather than having been imported from elsewhere. Our understanding of the details of these more local productions is still emerging. There are known productions, such as the winged cups found exclusively in northern Etruria, for which a production center has not yet been proposed, and localities, such as the Faliscan area, where it seems highly likely that the bucchero was locally produced.

Although the earliest bucchero was a rare product of high-quality workmanship, possibly made in workshops alongside precious metals and ivory, and attached to elite households, during the later decades of the seventh century the economic context of its production changes, as does its volume and quality. Before the end of the century, bucchero began to be mass-produced in most Etruscan cities, probably in specialized workshops, using shared techniques. This technological and organizational revolution is distinctive of late Orientalizing Etruria in other media as well (see Nijboer 1998 for a discussion of other ceramics and metals) and is perhaps matched by similar developments in ceramic production in Corinth.

In the sixth century, the thinnest bucchero (*sottile*) was no longer produced and fabrics in intermediate thicknesses gave way to thicker, less carefully finished wares called *bucchero pesante* (heavy) in Italian (Figure 15.1). These were mainly produced at Tarquinia (Camporeale 1972b; Locatelli 2004), Vulci (Celuzza 2000; Celuzza et al. 2004; Belevi Marchesini 2004), Oviato (Camporeale 1970; 1972a), and Chiusi (Barbagli and Iozzo 2007: 130–39). They were often elaborately ornamented with relief decoration with figurative, floral or geometric motifs and, most notably, frontal human heads (Donati 1967; 1968; 1969). Also during the sixth century, bucchero production spread beyond Etruria proper: large-scale production has been documented in Sabina (Cantù 2010), Capua (Locatelli 1993; Minoja 2000), and probably at other centers in this region – because bucchero has been found at many Campanian sites, such as in the lower levels of Pompeii (Fulford and Wallace Hadrill 1999: 64–66). Similarly, to the north, bucchero is found in Etruscan settlements in the Po Valley with distinctive stamped productions recovered from Marzabotto and other sites in western Emilia Romagna that contain numerous similarities to examples produced in northern Etruria at Vetulonia, Pisa and Poggio Colla (Santocchini Gerg 2012). Meanwhile, plainer bucchero is found at many sites, such as Forcello, where it may well have been made (Casini 2005; Deriu 2009). Productions have also been hypothesized in other neighboring areas in the Apennines and Adriatic coast (Benelli 2004), as well

as in the Faliscan area (Ambrosini 2004; Biella 2010), Rome and southern Latium (Rossi 2004).



Figure 15.1 Jug in the shape of a siren, c. 550–500 BCE. *Bucchero pesante*. Perhaps from Chiusi. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.145.25).

Photo: © 2015. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.

Later bucchero productions, in the fifth and perhaps into the fourth centuries, have been less well studied, but there is a trend towards gray (rather than

black) wares and the term “gray bucchero” (or *bucchero grigio*) is often used to describe these later types. The range of forms also declines and most vessels are bowls, chalices, plates or flagons. At the same time, fine wares with cream surfaces (with or without brown or red painted decoration), some with the same shapes as bucchero, grow in popularity.

4. Context of Use

There are two potential approaches to establishing how bucchero was used: investigating the function of the vessels and investigating the contexts in which they were found. Function can be inferred from the shape of bucchero vases. Most are shapes that were used as tableware: various types of bowls, plates, cups, jugs, and lids for serving or consuming food and drink. The amphoras, and rarely jars, are usually small and more likely to have been used as tableware than as vessels for the longer-term storage of liquids or grains. Bucchero was also used as a material to make aryballoi – small flasks for perfumed oils (Poupé 1963) – a use that is distinct from the tablewares. In the seventh century, bucchero was occasionally used to produce small female figurines, often parts of more complex objects, that may represent deities or mourners (Perkins 2007: 22–25). At Chiusi in the second half of the sixth century, bucchero was also used for producing large trays that are usually described as “braziers” and are found with miniature vessels and serving implements (Perkins 2007: 22).

Recent emphasis upon settlement archaeology in Etruria has made it clear that bucchero was a regular part of domestic assemblages, used on a regular basis for serving and consuming food and drink (e.g., at Castellina del Marangone, Cetamura, Gravisca, Lago dell’Accesa, Poggio Civitate [Murlo], Podere Tartuchino, Populonia, and Roselle: Gran-Aymerich and Dominguez 2011; Layton 2009; Pianu 2000; Camporeale 1997; Berkin 2003; Perkins and Attolini 1992; Acconcia 2010; Grassini 2010; Donati 1994). Bucchero is also found at public or cult buildings, such as at Tarquina (Bonghi Jovino, Chiamonte Treré and Bagnasco Gianni 2001). Nevertheless, an important use of bucchero was as a tomb-good, accompanying the dead to the afterlife. In some cases it seems likely that bucchero may have been purposefully made for funerary use, particularly when shapes are not functionally practical or constructed with walls or handles that are apparently too fragile for regular handling. The characteristic Etruscan use of banqueting symbolism and iconography in funerary contexts makes bucchero vessels appropriate in both settlements and tombs.

Bucchero was not only used in Etruria: it was also widely traded, often

alongside wine amphorae (Figure 15.2). The most intense trade seems to have been between the southern cities of Vulci and Cerveteri and the shores of the Gulf of Lion, between modern Marseilles and Barcelona. Bucchero and amphorae are found in coastal settlements as well as in shipwrecks. Most of the bucchero vessels exported in this way are either *kantharoi* for drinking wine or *oinochoai* for pouring wine. Distribution of bucchero beyond this area was less intense, but nonetheless extends along the Mediterranean coast of Spain to Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily, and Carthage in Tunisia, but only rarely to the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean (von Hase 1992; Gori and Bettini 2006; Gran-Aymerich and Turfa 2013: 383–385).

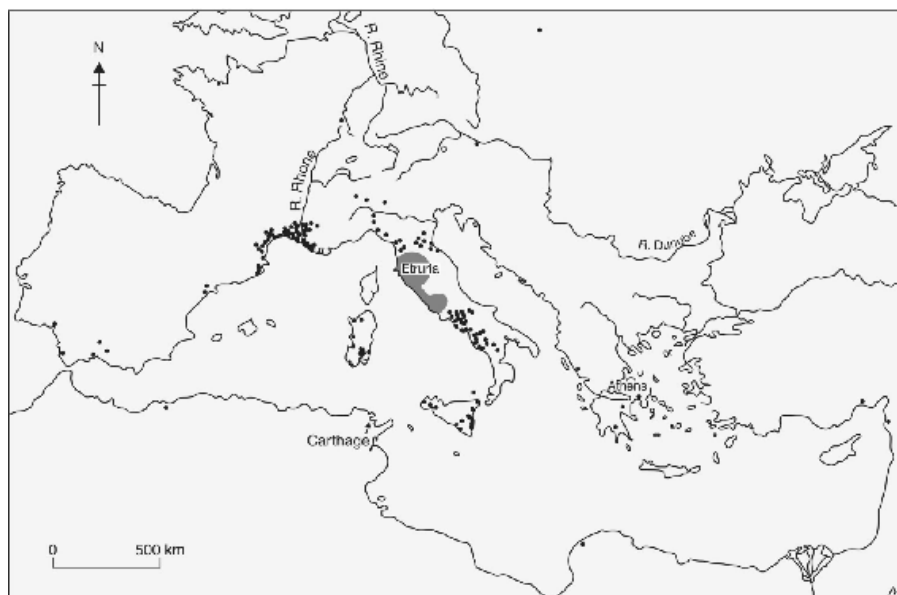


Figure 15.2 Map of bucchero finds in the Mediterranean basin. Drawing: Barker and Rasmussen 1998, 2000, fig. 49, p. 138.

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5. Context of Recovery

Because of the past focus in Etruscan studies on excavations in cemeteries, and the more favorable conditions for preservation in chamber tombs, the vast majority of complete bucchero vessels have been found in Etruscan tombs. Uncontrolled, or largely unrecorded, excavation in the urban cemeteries of Etruria in the nineteenth century recovered large quantities of bucchero, but very often the focus was on the recovery of the figured Greek wares, which were highly praised for their artistic worth. The business of opening tombs in the 1840s is vividly described by George Dennis:

This is generally a process requiring great care and tenderness, little of which, however, was here used, for it was seen by the first objects brought to light that nothing of value was to be expected – *hoc miserae plebi stabat sepulchrum* [“here is the tomb of poor people” (Horace *Satires* 1.8.10)]. Coarse pottery of unfigured, unvarnished ware, and a variety of small vases in black clay, were its only produce; and as they drew them forth, the labourers crushed them beneath their feet as things “cheaper than seaweed.” In vain we pleaded to save some from destruction; they were *roba di sciocchezza* – “foolish stuff” – the *capo* was inexorable; his orders were to destroy immediately whatever was of no pecuniary value, and he could not allow us to carry away one of these relics which he so despised

(Dennis 1848: 450).

The “small vases in black clay” will have been bucchero, and an immense quantity of data about the ancient context of bucchero is now unrecoverable. The discovery of undisturbed tombs containing bucchero is now a rare event.

6. Context of Display

Towards the end of the eighteenth century small quantities of bucchero were collected along with other antiquities, particularly sculptures and Greek vases. Sir Hans Sloane owned eight that were part of the founding collection of the British Museum in 1756 and William Hamilton, the British Ambassador in Naples, who is better known for his collection of Greek vases, owned at least 11, and perhaps as many as 29 bucchero vases by 1772. The major collection of Charles Townley (1737–1805) contained 28 bucchero items when it was purchased by the British Museum in 1815 (Perkins 2007: 3). By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, attitudes were changing as the realization of the Etruscans’ role in the history of Italy became more widely appreciated. In 1837 the Gregorian Museum opened with an impressive collection of Etruscan antiquities from the Papal territories, and there was a block-buster Etruscan exhibition in Pall Mall, London, in 1837 which was described by *The Times of London* as “very extraordinary and interesting” (26 January 1837, 7 col. F: Buranelli 1991: 33–56; Perkins 2007: 3–4). This increased presence of Etruscan material, including bucchero, in public collections and exhibitions was paralleled in other major nineteenth-century European and North American museums (on collections see further, Chapter 31). Bucchero was, and is, still collected by private individuals, although these are rarely published or seen by the public (Camporeale 1991).

7. Conclusions: Context of Study

In the twenty-first century, bucchero is a well-studied class of Etruscan artifact (Perkins 2007: 5–10; De Puma 2013). Some vases can be dated to within a few decades, although for many the uncertainty may be as much as a century; the exact date of the start of bucchero production, however, is still debated. Scholars now realize that bucchero was made at many different centers in modern day Tuscany, Latium, Umbria, Campania, and Emilia Romagna. Although it possible to differentiate between the types of vessels produced in some of these centers, there are still large areas of uncertainty. Perhaps the biggest challenge at present is to identify the precise places and facilities where bucchero was made. There must have been significant infrastructure at Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Vulci, Orvieto, and Chiusi, amongst other places, but to date none of the major workshops have been located and excavated. Exploring one of these centers will be the next big advance for the study of bucchero.

Archaeological excavation and the study of ceramics are both painstaking and lengthy processes. Ongoing excavations in Etruria are constantly finding more bucchero, and when in due course the finds are published our knowledge of bucchero will be considerably enhanced. Excavations at Veii by the University of Rome, La Sapienza, and at the Campo della Fiera, Orvieto by University of Perugia, both known to be cities where bucchero was produced, will considerably add to our knowledge of these productions. In Rome, the re-evaluation by an Italo-American team of the excavations at Sant’Ombono includes a study of the bucchero found there and will increase our knowledge of production in Rome and trade with its Etruscan neighbors. In Northern Etruria, excavations at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) and Poggio Colla are both producing large assemblages of bucchero, nearly 4000 shards have so far been catalogued at Poggio Colla. This latter site has also recently produced a remarkable find of bucchero stamped with an image of a birthing woman (Perkins 2012). This on-going work demonstrates that despite the depth and breadth of previous work on bucchero there is still much more to be discovered.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The study of bucchero is a complex subfield within Etruscan studies. The literature on the subject is somewhat fragmented and there is no single volume that might be considered a definitive source of reference for identifying or dating bucchero. As with so much of Etruscan scholarship, many useful and important works are not in the English language and many are out of print. Helpful overviews of bucchero and its study with extensive bibliographies have been provided by Martelli 1994, Camporeale 2000, Perkins 2007: 5–10, and De Puma 2013.

A fundamental point of departure is Tom Rasmussen's study of 40 tomb groups mainly from Cerveteri which he used to establish the first typology of bucchero from Southern Etruria. This is now a universally used standard for identifying and publishing bucchero (Rasmussen 1979, reprinted in 2006). Apart from providing a practical typology, it also contains insightful observations and discussion. Much work on bucchero has focused on individual collections and dozens of *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* volumes contain bucchero vases. Earlier volumes tend to publish only a brief description and a photograph, but some more recent volumes contain important discussion and analysis (Laurens and Touchefeu 1979; Gran-Aymerich 1982; 1992; Wehgartner 1983; De Puma 1996). Collections published outside this series also contain important discussion and commentary (Camporeale 1991; Regter 2003; Capponi and Ortenzi 2007; Perkins 2007; Bruni 2014). Regional productions of bucchero have been made accessible by a number of colloquia over the years that have resulted in edited volumes (Bonghi Jovino 1993, Naso 2004 and papers in the third volume of *Officina Etruscologia*).

CHAPTER 16

Etruscan Textiles in Context

Margarita Gleba

1. Introduction

Textiles represent a category of archaeological material little known to the general archaeological audience. Although textiles were recovered already in the first archaeological excavations and many of the pioneering publications date to the early twentieth century, only recently have they begun to be studied extensively as a part of the cultural record. Over the last few decades, textile studies have developed into an important new field of archaeology (Good 2001; Andersson Strand et al. 2010). The accumulation of data and the constant development of analytical techniques now permit more precise fiber and dye identifications. Meanwhile, the proliferation of technical studies finally allows a more synthetic approach to the history of textile technology. These not only demonstrate how much can be learned about the culture, society, technology, and economy of the ancient world through textiles but they also allow scholars to place them in their original context (Barber 1991; Gleba and Mannering 2012).

Because the environmental conditions in the Apennine peninsula are generally not conducive to the survival of organic material, the study of ancient textiles produced in this region has progressed more slowly in comparison to the situation in central and northern Europe. Etruscan textiles have been studied primarily through indirect evidence, with iconographic material being the most frequently cited source of information. Thus, Etruscan clothing, which is depicted on figurines, statues, and vases as well as in tomb paintings, has been studied extensively by Larissa Bonfante (2003). Meanwhile, various technical and social aspects of textile production in Etruria have been gleaned through a few important iconographic monuments. For example, the wooden cylindrical throne found in Tomb 89 at Verucchio, dated to c. 700 BCE (see also [Chapter 21](#)), contains a scene related to textile production. While interpretations of the intricately carved images vary (Torelli 1997: 68–69; von Eles 2002), most scholars agree that spinning and weaving are among the depicted activities. Another important object is a bronze rattle or *tintinnabulum* found in Tomb 5 of the Arsenale Militare necropolis in Bologna, dated to around 600 BCE (Morigi Govi 1971; also [Chapter 21](#)). Each side of the *tintinnabulum*, which is decorated in the *repoussé* technique, is divided into two sections; four scenes of various stages of textile manufacture are depicted. The bottom scene on

Side A depicts two women seated in throne-like chairs at the task of dressing distaffs with fiber. Above them, a woman spins with a drop-spindle. Side B of the *tintinnabulum* shows the weaving of the starting border necessary for the warp-weighted loom at the bottom, while the top scene provides a rendering of an unusual two-storied warp-weighted loom.

Scientific publications of actual Etruscan textiles started to appear only in the 1970s, and investigation of textile tools and textile production is an even more recent phenomenon. The catalogue of published, archaeologically excavated textiles has grown steadily since the publication of *Textile Production in Pre-Roman Italy* (Gleba 2008) as has the study of textiles tools and their various contexts.

2. The Material Remains of Textiles and Textile Implements in Etruria

Etruscan textiles survive in either an original organic, charred or, most frequently, mineralized state. The largest groups of textile remains still in their organic state of preservation have been excavated at Verucchio (Stauffer 2002, 2003, 2004, 2012) and at Sasso di Furbara (Masurel 1982; Mamez and Masurel 1992). Other finds come from Casale Marittimo (Esposito 1999), Volterra (Fiumi 1976: 65) and Cogion-Coste di Manone (Gleba and Turfa 2007). Probably the most famous Etruscan textile is the *Liber linteus*, the linen book of Zagreb which survived thanks to its reuse as mummy wrappings in Egypt (Roncalli 1980; Flury-Lemberg 1988; van der Meer 2007; and [Chapter 14](#) in this volume). The vast majority of archaeological textiles recovered in Etruria survive as mineralized traces on metal grave goods, such as bronze and iron weapons, personal accessories, and vessels. Mineralized textiles are formations in which metal corrosion products form casts around fibers retaining their external morphology and size almost unaltered either as positive or negative casts (Chen et al. 1998). Numerous textiles preserved in association with metal objects have been found in the burials of Bologna, Chiusi, Chianciano, Veii, Vulci, Tarquinia, Casale Marittimo, Murlo, and many other Etruscan sites (see catalogue in Gleba 2008: 50–56). In the past they were frequently removed as part of the conservation process, but more attention is being paid to these textile traces at present. Even when minute, they can provide a considerable amount of information about ancient textiles (see e.g., Bender Jørgensen 1986; 1992). Thus, when traces of different weave types are found on the same fibula, as for instance in some of the finds from Tarquinia Le Rose (Buranelli 1983: 129), a conjecture can be made that the deceased was wearing several layers of garments. If a number of textile traces are present in a burial, their distribution, position, and the direction of the weave in each fragment can help scholars reconstruct where the garments

were located.

Even when textiles do not survive, their original presence may be indicated through other evidence, such as the location of fibulae and other decorative ornaments. In some cases, reconstructions of garments are possible based on the position of surviving decorative elements in relation to the skeleton, sarcophagus, or trench, as in the case of some female costumes for the burials at Verucchio (Bentini and Boiardi 2007: 135 figs. 13–14). Thus, a shroud with a border consisting of small bronze rings has also been hypothesised for an Early Iron Age female inhumation in Tarquinia (Trucco 2006: 100).

Meanwhile, the discovery of various small decorative objects such as beads and fibulae on the outside of the top part of the cinerary urn likely indicates that the urn was wrapped with a cloth, which was decorated or fastened with them. Such, for example, is the case of several ninth century BCE cinerary urns at Tarquinia (Trucco 2006: 98–99).

Investigation of the surviving textiles has demonstrated that the inhabitants of Etruria utilized sophisticated technologies for textile production and that they were familiar with diverse fibers, dyes, and weaving techniques (Gleba 2008). Thus, a variety of fibers were used in textile production in ancient Italy. These include linen, hemp, esparto, various tree basts, sheep wool, goat hair and even mineral asbestos. This variety reflects not only the availability of raw materials – whether locally available or obtained through exchange – but also the knowledge of technologies to convert them from their raw state to usable fiber. Numerous techniques were used to create textiles, including loom weaving, tablet weaving, soumak, and a form of twining. The thread counts go up to 30–40 threads per centimeter, which reflects their quality. Already during the ninth century BCE, there is a clear tendency to combine yarns of opposite twists to create spin-patterned textiles. Examples such as those discovered in Verucchio and Sasso di Furbara indicate both the Etruscans' knowledge of this technique and their appreciation of the subtlety of spin patterns.

Dyeing techniques appear in Italy from at least the Early Iron Age. Recent dye analyses of surviving textiles demonstrate the popularity of reds, blues, and purples. Thus, Verucchio Mantle 1 was dyed red with madder, while the fibers of its border were most likely treated with madder and woad, resulting in a purple hue (Stauffer 2012). Mantle 2, on the other hand, was dyed red-orange with madder and a yellow dye, while its border was also dyed with woad, creating a purple-red effect. Dye analyses thus demonstrate that several different dyes were used to add color to the Verucchio textiles, while their combination in some textiles shows an understanding of a complex, multiple-stage dyeing processes. The most expensive dye of antiquity – royal or shellfish purple – has recently been identified in textiles from the Hellenistic period burials at Strozacapponi (Perugia) (Gleba and Vanden Berghe 2014).

In the absence of extant textiles, studies of the number, distribution, and

morphology of textile tools – based on statistical analyses of their physical parameters of preservation, size, weight, and use wear – can provide valuable information about technology, scale of production, and the importance of textile manufacture for a particular site. Functional typologies of tools, combined with analysis of the contexts in which they were found and their distribution patterns, allow inferences about changes and development of textile production in and between different sites and regions. This makes it possible to address issues such as the spread and use of technology, the mobility of craftspeople, communication patterns, and chronological changes in production.

3. Case Study: Poggio Civitate and Poggio Aguzzo (Murlo)

The site of Poggio Civitate (Murlo), located 25 kilometers south of Siena thrived between the early seventh and third quarter of the sixth centuries BCE (see further, [Chapter 8](#) in this volume), and furnishes excellent material for a case study. The information that can be retrieved from analyses of the textile implements found throughout the site ([Figure 16.1](#)) can be compared to the technical data gained from the study of textile fragments found in the contemporary burials at the nearby Poggio Aguzzo ([Figure 16.2](#)). Judged solely by the number of spinning and weaving implements found, Poggio Civitate appears to have been a significant textile-producing center. In 1998, the catalogued and analyzed finds included 441 spindle whorls, 69 loom weights, 580 spools and 13 needles. The latest catalogue lists 568 spindle whorls, 94 loom weights, 849 spools (*rocchetti*), and 15 needles (see the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Archive database (<http://www.poggiocivitate.org/>) for the most up-to-date counts and additional information about the site's finds; last accessed July 31, 2015).

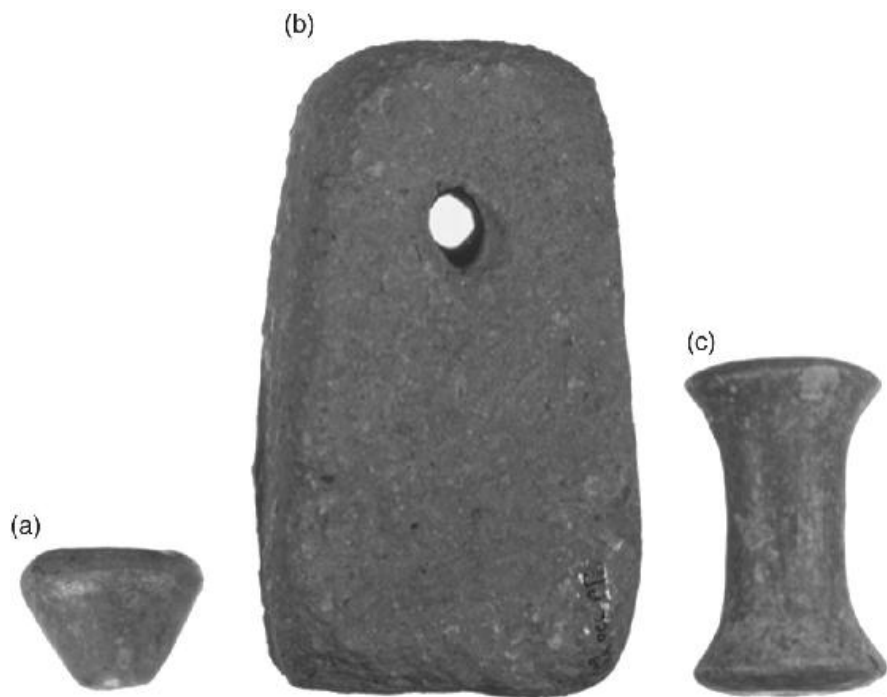


Figure 16.1 Textile tools from Poggio Civitate, Murlo: a) spindle whorl; b) loom weight; c) spool.

Photo: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

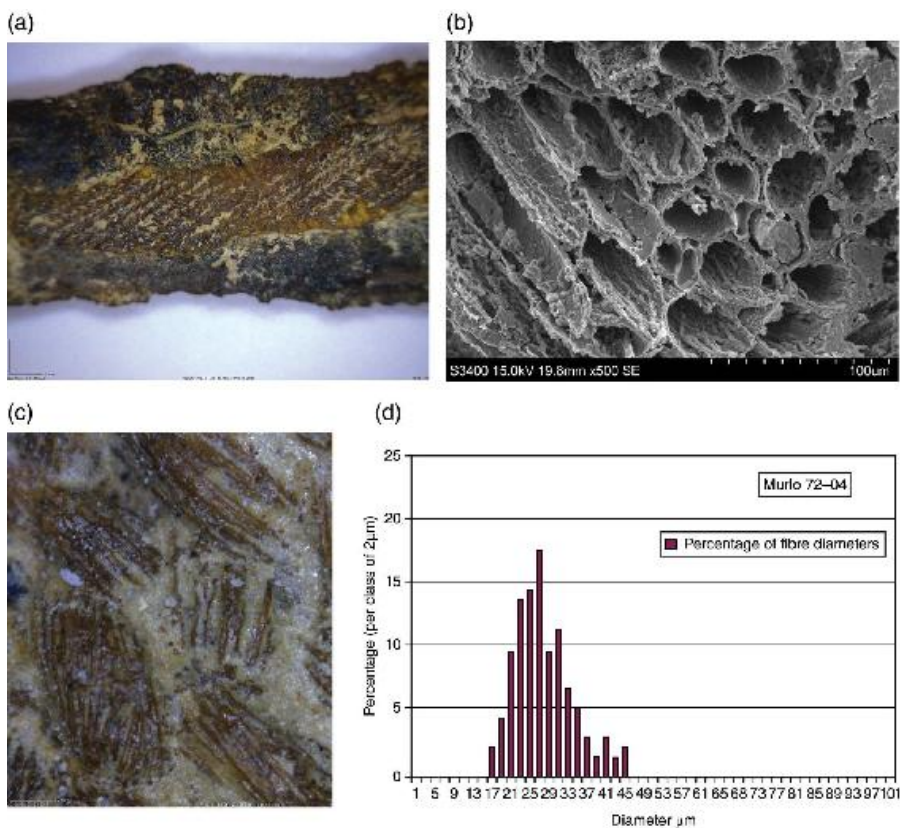


Figure 16.2 Textiles from Poggio Aguzzo, Murlo: a) tablet weave on an iron spear counterweight; b) Scanning Electron Microscope image of the negative casts of wool fibers of textile from Tomb 1; c) tabby textile preserved on the iron knife from Tomb 4 under high magnification with twist of the yarn and fibers clearly visible; d) histogram of wool quality measurements of textile from Tomb 1.

Photo: M. Gleba.

The great number of spindle whorls at Poggio Civitate, especially when compared to other contemporaneous sites for which similar information is available (e.g., Acquarossa and Lago d'Accesa), indicates that the scale of yarn production was large, well beyond the requirements of domestic needs. The mean weight of spindle whorls at Poggio Civitate is around 10 grams (range 2–48), which is appropriate for spinning short, fine fiber. This suggests that a large quantity of very fine yarn was produced at the site. Over 90 percent of the whorls are of a truncated conical shape, suitable for spinning yarn of medium twist. The very uniform proportions of the whorls also suggest that spinning was both organized and specialized. The concentration of the large number of very uniform implements in specific areas of the site, such as the so-called Southeast Building (also known as OC2/Workshop),

suggests that spinning was one of the major crafts on the site.

The number of loom weights at Poggio Civitate seems to be small in comparison to the numbers of spindle whorls and spools. Their weight ranges from 34 to 795 grams. This is a very broad range in comparison to loom weight size at contemporary sites, which suggests that textiles of various qualities and complexities were produced at Poggio Civitate.

Although not all parts of the site have been excavated, the numbers of spindle whorls with respect to loom weights suggest that the amount of yarn spun significantly exceeded the quantity of fabric that was being produced at the site. This inconsistency may be explained by the extraordinary quantity of spools discovered on the site. Their number (over 840) is higher even than the quantity of spindle whorls and, if the hypothesis that they were used in tablet weaving is correct (see Raeder Knudsen 2012), it may indicate that the weaving workshop at Poggio Civitate specialized in the production of patterned tablet-woven bands, which could have been used to decorate garments and other textiles. This interpretation is suggested by the popularity of patterned borders on garments depicted in contemporary figurative representations (Bonfante 2003) and by the survival of actual borders found at Verucchio (Stauffer 2002), Sasso di Furbara (Mamez and Masurel 1992) and Poggio Aguzzo (see below). Such a situation would not be surprising, especially since, in addition to being decorative, these elements were also indicators of status (Stauffer 2012).

Finally, a number of needles have been found at Poggio Civitate. Not only do they indicate that sewing was practiced on the site, but they also suggest that several workers could have been sewing simultaneously, because in normal domestic contexts, needles are quite rare.

The distribution and style of decoration of the spinning and weaving implements at Poggio Civitate may be taken to indicate that most of them were probably associated with the Orientalizing phase, and hence, were manufactured and/or used over the period of about a quarter to a half of a century. Although scattered by the destruction and levelling of the site, the tools for textile production appear to be concentrated in two areas, both associated with structures dating to the late seventh century BCE. One is in the northern part of the Lower Building (also known as OC1/Residence) (see [Figure 8.1](#)). Another area in which implements are concentrated is around, and to the north of, the so-called Southeast Building (or OC2/Workshop) (see also [Figure 8.1](#)). This structure has been identified as an industrial center because of deposits of the debris of ivory, glass and bronze working, as well as the presence of unfired tiles (Nielsen 1998: 98–99). The distribution of spinning and weaving implements not only confirms the functional identification of this structure but also suggests that textile manufacture was as important as the production of other types of materials and goods, mostly luxury in nature.

From this brief summary it is clear that textiles were manufactured at Poggio Civitate on a scale significantly greater than what would be considered production for domestic consumption. In fact, the evidence of textile implements points towards Poggio Civitate having played an important role in the production and possibly even textile exchange during the Orientalizing period. Analysis of textile tools thus permits scholars to draw some conclusions about the role textiles played in the economy of an important settlement in inland Etruria.

In the meantime, recently analyzed mineralized textiles from the burials at the nearby Poggio Aguzzo, provide a more tangible idea of what these textiles may have looked like, what material they were made of and how they were used (see [Figure 16.2](#)). Textile traces survive on two iron spear counterweights from Tomb 1 and an iron knife from Tomb 4, all dated to the seventh century BCE, and hence contemporary with the majority of the textile tools recovered from Poggio Civitate (Tuck 2009). The knife blade preserves textile traces on both surfaces and going over the edges, indicating that it was deliberately wrapped in the textile. Wrapping metal grave goods is a common phenomenon in Etruria and pre-Roman Italy in general. Knives, weapons, strigils, spits, and mirrors are among the most common objects to have been wrapped (Gleba 2014). The deposition of such “enclotted” objects in funerary containers, in certain cases, excludes the possibility of accidental contact with textiles. It is unclear, however, whether this phenomenon has a ritual significance in the funerary environment or if it represents a regular practice tied to the safekeeping of precious metal objects. The textile weave appears to be a relatively balanced tabby woven in single-spun z-twisted yarn. The yarn measures ca. 0.4–0.5 millimeters in diameter in both systems. This quality of yarn corresponds well with the mean weight of the spindle whorls at Poggio Civitate, as light whorls (10–25 grams) are optimal for spinning yarn with diameters 0.3–0.6 millimeters (Grömer 2005). The thread count is about 18–20 threads/cm in both weave systems. Fibers (most likely sheep wool) appear quite uniform in terms of diameter under high magnification, and are positioned quite parallel to each other, suggesting that the wool may have been combed prior to spinning.

Likewise, one of the iron spear counterweights from Tomb 1 preserves textile traces in various areas on its surface, but it is unclear whether the textile was deliberately wrapped around the object or if it came in contact with it incidentally. The textile weave appears to be a twill. The thread measures about 0.4 millimeters in both systems and is single-spun, medium z-twisted. The thread count in both systems is about 20 threads per centimeter. Thus, in this case, the technical parameters of the textile also correspond well to those of the textile tools found at Poggio Civitate.

The second iron spear counterweight from Tomb 1 preserves clear traces of a tablet weave and possible traces of another textile. Here, too, it is unclear

whether the textile was wrapped deliberately around the object or if it came in contact with it by accident. However, the fact that the preserved traces are of a tablet weave (and they only appear on one side of the object) suggest the latter, as tablet weaves are usually found on items of clothing and generally garments of special and/or ceremonial nature (see [Chapter 21](#)). It is also possible that a garment of the deceased may have been positioned in the burial in such a way that it covered the spear counterweight.

Tablet weaving involves passing threads through holes in the corners of (usually) square tablets which, when rotated forward or back, force the threads to form different sheds. By rotating cards in different combinations, it is possible to achieve numerous and quite complex patterns. This method is suitable for weaving narrow bands (such as for belts), heading bands for the warp of a warp-weighted loom, or decorative borders for the ground textile weave. Tablet weaving in Etruria is attested not only by the presence of such borders on textiles (e.g., the examples from Verucchio; cf. Raeder Knudsen 2012), but also by the finds of tablets, metal clasps, bone spacers with pegs and, particularly, terracotta spools. The latter were probably used as weights in tablet weaving. As noted above, extraordinarily large quantities of spools have been found at Poggio Civitate, documenting intensive tablet weaving activity at the site during the Orientalizing period.

The tablet weave on the second spear counterweight from Tomb 1 at Poggio Aguzzo is made up of at least 17 tablets alternating the direction of the tablet rotation in a pattern 3Z3S, with about 12 tablets per centimeter. The threads are single spun z-twisted and measure about 0.3 millimeters in diameter. The subtle pattern created by alternating S and Z direction of tablet rotation (which could have been enhanced by dyeing the alternating groups of threads different colors) would have been visible as stripes. This kind of pattern appears on some of the tablet borders found at Verucchio (Raeder Knudsen 2012). It is impossible to know how wide the tablet weave originally was or if it incorporated any other pattern, but a conjecture may be made that it was a border of a garment, traces of which are no longer clearly discernible on the spear counterweight. Some single threads seen on its surface are s-twisted, unlike the tablet weave yarn. Yet another area preserves what appears to be a textile with extremely tangled fibres on the surface and no discernible weave structure – indication of either hard wear or fulling of the surface. In either case, the textile would likely have been an item of outerwear.

Overall, the textiles from Poggio Aguzzo fit well within the corpus of Etruscan textiles studied thus far. They are typical in terms of their weave (tabby and twill are among the most common weaves during the seventh century BCE), twist direction (while many Etruscan textiles are spin patterned, the majority are woven in z-twisted yarn), and thread count (see Table 2b in Gleba 2008: 85). Tablet weaves are also not unusual and appear to be markers of status and ceremonial textiles in burials.

In addition to the technical aspects of the original textiles, mineralized traces also allow identifying their raw material. Using Scanning Electron Microscopy, the raw material of the textiles from Tomb 1 at Poggio Aguzzo was identified as sheep wool, based on the characteristic scales preserved as negative impressions on the metal salts. Measuring the diameter of the voids left by the fibers also permitted wool quality analysis. The quality of modern wool is determined by its fiber diameter, crimp, yield, color, and staple strength and length. Fiber diameter is the single most important wool characteristic determining quality and price. Analyses of wool fiber fineness have been used to determine the fleece type of prehistoric sheep, enabling comparisons with fleeces from modern sheep, particularly the so-called primitive or unimproved sheep breeds, and leading to conclusions about ancient breeds. A fleece consists of the outer coat containing coarse kemp (over 100 microns in diameter) and hair (over 60 microns in diameter), and the much finer underwool. Assessment of fiber quality is based on a technique used in the modern textile industry and consists of the diameter measurement of 100 fibers per thread or staple, and statistical analyses resulting in a distribution histogram.

The wool in the Poggio Aguzzo textiles has a rather wide distribution curve, generally skewed to fine, with the maximum diameter not exceeding 50 microns and with a mean diameter and mode above 20 microns. This type of wool appeared in Europe at least by the seventh century BCE. Similar distributions are found in wool samples from other contemporaneous and later Italian sites, such as Riesenferner, Este, Belmonte (Gleba 2012) and Monte Bibele (Moulhéat 2008), as well as from Greece (Metallinou et al. 2009), Switzerland (Rast-Eicher 2008) and Austria (Rast-Eicher and Bender Jørgensen 2013).

Detailed analysis of the textile fragments from Poggio Aguzzo therefore demonstrates the quantity and quality of the information which can be gleaned from even small and deteriorated textiles, allowing scholars to place them in their economic, social and cultural contexts.

4. Conclusions

Investigation of textiles and textile production in Etruria is still in its infancy and the field has much potential to develop further in the near future. Studies of the individual finds are constantly increasing the corpus of textile material. Statistical analysis of their technical data is finally permitting scholars to define chronologically and geographically specific characteristics of the textile material. Over the last 20 years, the field of textile archaeology has been enriched by a series of new scientific methods including isotopic tracing, radiocarbon dating, dye analysis, scanning electron microscopy, X-ray

spectroscopy, CAT-scanning, DNA analysis, etc. (Good 2001; Andersson et al. 2010). Their systematic application to the archaeological textile finds of Italy is likely to generate valuable data on textile technology, chronology, provenance and preservation. Placing this information in its archaeological context will, in turn, help to clarify the larger picture.

Textile production was both a domestic and a commercial activity in Etruria. Spinning and weaving were carried out by the women of every household (Gleba 2008; see further, [Chapter 21](#)). Already at the end of the Bronze Age, the deposition of spindle whorls, distaffs and spools in female funerary assemblages testifies to women's contributions to the communities as textile workers, and indicates that textile craft became a symbol of the female sphere (Gleba 2009; Lipkin 2012). While the regional significance of textile tools in burials is a matter of debate, most scholars agree that women, whether on their own or with the help of household slaves, produced not only most of the textiles needed by the household but also the fabric used for gifts and other exchange.

During the Orientalizing and Archaic periods, there is a significant increase in the scale of textile production, indicated by the large number and standardization of tools on settlement sites, as well as the standardization of certain textile types. In some cases, textile implements are concentrated in specific areas where other kinds of production, such as ceramic or metal, have been documented, suggesting a household or even workshop mode of manufacture and the existence of at least part-time specialist craftspeople. Cloth was likely produced for commercial purposes and textile trade has been tied to salt, amber, slaves, and other commodities (Gleba 2008: 195). Textile trade also seems to be indicated indirectly by the spread of fashion, for example from Etruria to central Europe (Hallstatt culture). Our understanding of the organizational aspects of the Etruscan textile production and trade, however, is far from complete and still requires detailed regional studies. Moreover, textiles produced by the women formed an important part of public rituals, as indicated by numerous textile tools found in the votive deposits of important Etruscan sanctuaries (Gleba 2009; Meyers 2013 and her [Chapter 21](#)). Because the presence of textile tools in sanctuaries is traditionally tied to votive activities, they need to be re-evaluated in the light of the possible existence of sanctuary textile workshops.

An understanding of the development of textile production in Etruria is crucial to any attempt to set this technology in its social and economic context and to provide a more comprehensive view of textile production as an important and integral part of the ancient Mediterranean economy, giving it equal weight to other crafts such as the manufacture of metal and ceramic goods. The issue of textile production is also important for the investigation of craft specialization, workshop production, division of labor and gender. Finally, geographical and chronological variations in textile work as

evidenced by differences in textile implements can help explain how these technologies were transmitted between different geographical areas.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Since its first edition in 1975, Larissa Bonfante's *Etruscan Dress* (new edition 2003) remains the unsurpassed reference to Etruscan dress and its development. The most comprehensive work to date on the subject of textile production in ancient Italy in general and Etruria in particular is M. Gleba's *Textile production in Pre-Roman Italy* (2008), which provides a summary of the archaeological, written and iconographic evidence for textile production in Etruria and Italy from 1000–300 BCE. For more information on ancient textiles and textile production in general, see Elizabeth Barber's *Prehistoric Textiles. The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages* (1991), which remains a *sine qua non*, while *Textiles and Textile Production in Europe from Prehistory to AD 400* (Gleba and Mannering 2012) is the most recent sourcebook on European textiles. Both provide exhaustive bibliographies on the subject.

CHAPTER 17

Etruscan Wall Painting

Insights, Innovations, and Legacy

Lisa C. Pieraccini

So the art of painting has already been brought to perfection even in Italy. At all events there survive even today in the temples at Ardea paintings that are older than the city of Rome, which to me at all events are incomparably remarkable, surviving for so long a period as though freshly painted ... There are pictures surviving at Caere that are even older.

Pliny, *Natural History* 35.6.17–18 (translated by H. Rackham)

1. Introduction

For centuries, artists, archaeologists, scholars, and poets have been captivated by the phenomenal images found on the painted walls of Etruscan tombs. These tomb paintings offer an extraordinary look at the earliest examples of monumental wall painting in ancient Italy (a corpus that has not survived, except fragmentarily, in Archaic and Classical Greece) (Moorman 2011, Hurwit 2014). The striking paintings on Etruscan tomb walls and terracotta plaques not only provide us with intimate details of their daily life and funerary rituals, and the murky world of their afterlife, but they also document the early traditions and innovations of wall painting in ancient Italy. Historical narratives, landscapes, architectural motifs, portrait-like representations, and the motif of the procession all appear in Etruscan wall painting, although mainstream scholarship, despite the absence of a significant body of comparanda from Archaic and Classical Greece, tends to see these as Greek and Roman inventions. The scenes in the Tomb of the Diver stand as an isolated example of large-scale pictorial art in a Greek community in southern Italy: most scholars see it as a Greek work, though it may have been commissioned for an Etruscan residing in Paestum (see Holloway 2006).

Moreover, some elements of Roman wall painting commonly given a Greek origin actually appear earlier in Etruria where they were more likely to have been seen by Roman painters in their original contexts. Thanks to recent contributions in the field of Etruscan wall painting by Alessandro Naso (1996; 2001; 2003; 2010), Adriano Maggiani (1983; 1998; 2005) and Stephan

Steingraber (1985; 2006; 2014), it is now possible to recognize Etruscan innovations that may have contributed to the later artistic traditions of early Rome. The effects of Greek art on the legacy of Roman art are well-studied and have always been acknowledged, but the possible relationships between Etruscan and Roman art have not received the same attention. Etruscan painting, in particular, has not been thoroughly investigated as a possible precursor to many motifs and themes found later in Roman art. In this chapter, I briefly survey some of the innovations of Etruscan wall painting that merit further study, including the themes of doors, landscapes, processions, historical narratives, and other themes. In this way, the chapter seeks to redress an imbalance in the scholarship and situate the Etruscans more prominently as pioneers in the history of ancient Italic wall painting. Moreover, it highlights the evidence that may contribute to a better understanding of the Etruscan–Roman artistic relationship.

2. Chronology

The earliest examples of Etruscan wall painting survive in tombs and date to the first half of the seventh century BCE. Naso's 2010 assessment of these early tombs from Caere (Cerveteri) and Veii reveal a remarkable time of experimentation, one that confirms the leading role these centers played in Etruria during the Orientalizing period. At Caere, artisans painted directly on tufa walls, primarily on ceilings and around doors, while at Veii, they added a coating of clay until they eventually decided on plastering the tufa walls before painting them (Naso 2010: 67). Naso sees the development of this medium as an indigenous phenomenon, arguing that claims of external influences, be they from the eastern Mediterranean or Greece, are untenable (Naso 2010: 82). But for many scholars, Etruscan wall painting derives from the pictorial traditions established by the Greeks, even though the Etruscan examples of full-scale wall painting pre-date the extant Greek ones (save for some mural fragments, see Hurwit 2014). Moreover, there is hardly any evidence of tomb painting in Archaic and Classical Greece, while Etruria provides the largest repertoire from this time period in the ancient Mediterranean. We know that the Greeks painted their temples (see further, Moorman 2011; Walter-Karydi 2012; Hurwit 2014), just as we know that the Etruscans had a literary tradition, but precious little has survived in either context.

A chronology of Etruscan wall painting serves best to demonstrate the development of this art form on Italian soil. Robert Leighton (2005), for example, has highlighted the important use of painting on Villanovan ash urns dating between 900 and 700 BCE (see also Bartoloni, Beijer, and de Santis 1985). That these vessels represented the “home” is hardly disputed. Some of

their façades show incised décor with their original paint. The ends of the huts' ridgepoles are often carved in the shapes of animals and the doors are frequently accentuated with small triangles, or the dog-tooth pattern, a motif also found in the very earliest painted tombs at Caere (e.g., the Tomb of Dogtooth Frieze and the Sorbo Tomb (Naso 1996). This evidence suggests that Etruscan artists were not inspired by imported vases during this early period but rather by their own existing painting styles used to decorate dwellings, civic buildings and subsequently, tombs (these paintings may have been done on clay surfaces smoothed over the walls of early homes: see Roncalli 1985: 74f; Naso 2010). Moreover, the painted clay plaques produced at Caere during the Archaic period may be a direct descendant of early wall painting on clay walls or tiles in Villanovan and Orientalizing period homes (Roncalli 1985; Guidi, Bellelli, and Trojsi 2006; Pieraccini 2011). It is possible that Etruscan tomb painting grew out of early home décor, namely, from the desire to replicate the home within a tomb.

The earliest monumental tombs thus far discovered at Caere architecturally imitate the home, a type exemplified by the Tomb of the Hut dated to the early seventh century BCE. While no painted décor has survived on the structure's walls, the situation is different in contemporary tombs such as the Sorbo Tomb, the Mengarelli Tomb and the Dogtooth Tomb (to name just a few) (Naso 1996; 2003; 2010). Additional examples have also been found at San Giuliano, Vulci, Veii, and Tarquinia (e.g., the *Tumulo della Regina* is a recent find from the latter site: Mandolesi and de Angelis 2011). These paintings convey much about early innovations in this medium on a large scale. The pictorial elements appear around the doors and on the ceilings of the tombs, analogous to the décor depicted on clay huts.

Another essential characteristic or early innovation of Etruscan tomb painting was the simple division of the back wall into horizontal parts (usually three). Examples appear in the Tomb of the Augurs (520 BCE), the Tomb of the Baron (510 BCE), the Tomb of the Lionesses (520 BCE), the Tomb of the Olympiads (510 BCE), the Tomb of the Jugglers (520 BCE), and the Tomb of the Triclinium (470 BCE), just to name a few. Even the early Campana Tomb at Veii, which dates to the end of the seventh century BCE, has a divided back wall in a tripartite fashion. This dominant horizontal division can be seen in virtually all four styles of later Roman painting. This is an important point to stress, as Roman artists were not looking at Greek painted rooms or tombs but rather at portable picture panels brought back to Rome during triumphal processions from the third century BCE onward. And even so, these paintings were not the actual painted walls, but rather painted panels most likely of myth and historical battles (Plutarch *Marcellus* 21; Livy *History of Rome* 25).

Missing from the archaeological record in Etruria are the full-scale paintings above ground. To date no domestic examples have survived, but there is evidence of paintings from temples and civic structures (for example, Temple

A at Pyrgi (Steingräber 2006: 131) and, from the much later Hellenistic period, the hypogeum of C. Genucius Clevsina from Caere). Roncalli has also suggested that the seventh century BCE paintings on terracotta tiles might have been used to “protect private and public buildings” (1985: 74–78, esp. 75). Therefore, these tomb and tile paintings, along with the decorated clay hut urns, provide critical evidence about the paintings that were employed in early homes as well as in secular and religious structures, thereby changing and broadening our perspectives about this Etruscan art form outside of the tomb.

3. Themes

Doors

The numerous doors painted on the walls of Archaic tombs represent one of the most fascinating components of Etruscan paintings. Found in some of the most famous tombs, these doors are often neglected in terms of their architectural features and possible connections to the doors we see later in Roman Second Style painting. Two dozen doors are painted in some 16 tombs from the Archaic period and a handful from the Hellenistic period, all located at Tarquinia. Similar doors carved in tufa dating to the same period exist at Caere and other sites in southern Etruria (Naso 1996). To date, analysis of the painted doors has focused primarily on what they represent: that is, either as the *locus familiaris* (a familiar architectural element imitating the home) or the *locus medius* (a liminal space, or entrance to the underworld; Torelli 1999). Very little attention, however, has been paid to their architectural and decorative features. These doors attempt to open up the wall, either by inviting the viewer to walk through the door or by adorning the wall with architectural décor. The first known doors painted on tomb walls in Etruria appear at Tarquinia in the sixth century BCE, namely in the Tomb of the Hut (575 BCE) (Steingräber 1985: no. 79) and the Tomb of the Jade Lions (530 BCE) (Steingräber 1985: no. 52), and feature Doric-style post and lintel architecture. That these doors represented the very doors of houses is strongly suggested by the realistic depiction of their structural supports: the posts are consistently tapered slightly inward with a heavy overlapping lintel beam. Circular metal studs or bosses adorn the doors with two rows of three bosses across the top, middle and lower portions and nine down the center, as seen in the Tomb of the Augurs (Figure 17.1). Other Tarquinian tombs – such as the Tomb of the Cardarelli, the Tomb of the Whipping, and the Tomb of the Inscriptions – display the exact pattern of bosses. By the Hellenistic period, the number of round bosses is reduced to single rows of three across, seen in

the Tomb of the Charuns, Tomb 5636, and the Querciola Tomb II (similar doors appear in contemporary Etruscan vase painting: see Beazley 1947: 166–167 and pl. 37). This same pattern, namely a single row of three bosses across the upper, middle and lower portion of a door, commonly appears in the Roman false doors from Second Style Painting: examples include the doors in the House of Julius Polybius and the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, bedroom M in the Villa of Fannius Synistor from Boscoreale and the atrium in the Villa Oplontis, among others).



Figure 17.1 Tomb of Augurs, back wall, c.530–520 BCE. From Tarquinia. Fresco.

Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

Landscapes

Another innovation in Etruscan painting can be found in the landscapes that appear in Etruscan tombs, such as the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, the Tomb of the Ship, and the Tomb of the Blue Demons (all located at Tarquinia). These paintings clearly convey the importance of this theme in Etruria long before its use in Roman homes and villas, and well before its appearance in Hellenistic Greece. While true landscapes do occur in Minoan wall painting (Immerwahr 1990), it is only much later, in the fourth century BCE, that they appear in the royal tombs at Vergina; to date, no examples

have been recovered from Archaic or Classical Greek contexts. Pliny (*Natural History* 35.116–117) cites Studius, an Augustan painter, as the introducer of landscape painting in Rome. However, the archaeological evidence from Etruria suggests that this subject matter was known from the Archaic period onward.

The remarkable continuous panorama of a seashore on the walls of the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing ([Figure 17.2](#), Plate Section) (Holloway 1965; Steingräber 1985: no. 50) represents the earliest example of a monumental landscape painting in all of ancient Italy. There are no scenes quite like it in contemporary or even later Greek art. More importantly, the ways in which the visible features of the coastline are captured is unique. They take the viewer beyond the walls with an expansive sky teeming with multi-colored birds swooping down while dolphins surge up and out of the water. As men hunt birds, the birds fly down to catch the fisherman's fish – the circle of events results in a Kodak-like picture of life on the Tyrrhenian seashore. Banqueters recline above, as if looking down on the scene while they exchange an intimate moment. The brightly colored birds, the smiling diver, and the vast panorama exemplify best the painter's ability to convey not just a landscape, but vibrant movement and harmony between man and nature.



Figure 17.2 Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, left wall, c.530 BCE. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

When comparing the tomb's imagery, namely the diver, to a similar diver depicted in the Tomb of the Diver at Paestum, Jeffrey Hurwit emphasizes the Etruscan painter's ability to blend man and nature; in contrast, the emphasis in the Paestum tomb painting is "not on nature or on the youth's relationship to nature: it is on the youth himself" (1991: 39). But Hurwit also points out that Greek artists depicted "landscapes" in their vase paintings from the Archaic period (there are more examples in black-figure than in red-figure). Whether they ever produced landscapes in contemporary wall paintings is difficult to determine, as thus far no examples have survived. That said, it is unlikely that the Etruscans had to look elsewhere for inspiration when it came to the painting of landscapes. While it is true that Greek Archaic vase painters depicted some bathers and water, some trees, and mounds of dirt, their works still fail to compare to the vast seascape found in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing (albeit we are comparing wall painting to vase painting). Rather, these

vases show that foliage and trees were used as “attributes” and not real landscapes where nature takes precedent or is in harmony with the actions of man. The Greeks of the Archaic period are far more concerned with “man” than they ever are with nature (or, at least, their painted pottery suggests this) (see Hurwit 1991). In any case, there is a clear development of Etruscan wall painting well under way in Etruria by the mid-seventh century BCE, from which evolve solid techniques, style, and subject matter, including landscapes. In this context, it is worth remembering that the artists responsible for painting these tombs could have also been responsible for the paintings above ground in temples, civic buildings, and elite homes. In other words, it is time we consider the likelihood that these artisans were not exclusively painting tombs and that landscapes were not uncommon subject matter in civic and religious buildings.

Another unique landscape appears in the Tomb of the Ship, which dates to the mid-fifth century BCE and thus offers the earliest wall painting of a harbor scene known at this time in ancient Italy (Colonna 2003; Petrarulo 2012). On the back wall, a conventional banquet plays out. However, the left wall displays a seascape with a large cargo ship and several smaller ships. Rock formations or cliffs jut out of the scenery. A large man (probably the deceased) gazes at the busy harbor scene with one arm raised in the air – the composition is highly innovative, as Steingraber (2006) and Giovanni Colonna (2003) have noted. Behind the man, servants attend to a table laden with banqueting vessels (*kylikeion*) while trees decorate the foreground. Whether the rock formations indicate an entrance to the underworld, as we see later in the so-called Odyssey paintings from the Esquiline in Rome (c.50 BCE), is unclear. But it is interesting to note that such rock formations are not uncommon in Italy (e.g., see the islands off of Sicily). Colonna (2003: 74) argues that the Etruscan ship symbolizes the journey of the deceased to the underworld while other scholars have seen it as representative of the deceased’s success in maritime trade (Steingraber 2006: 143–153; Petrarulo 2012, esp. 128). Regardless of its potential symbolic significance, a seascape is visually communicated with more than one ship and coastal crags, all intricately detailed. This seascape may have descendants in later Roman paintings, represented best from the painted harbor scenes surviving from the Vesuvian towns (Ling 1991: 148). The way in which the harbor scene merges with the conventional banquet on the back wall along with the *kylikeion* and the large man on the left is further indicative of the blending of symbolic imagery with realistic details – a noteworthy component of Etruscan funerary art also seen in other tombs where the funerary banquets mix personal and significant details of the life of the deceased.

The Tomb of the Blue Demons, dated no later than 400 BCE, is one of the most significant tombs discovered in Etruria in the past 30 years (Cataldi Dini 1989). The right wall depicts a rocky landscape, not on the shores of the

Tyrrhenian coast, but rather in the obscure Etruscan underworld. Once more there is a banquet on the back wall while a procession with musicians and a servant attending to a *kylikeion* takes place on the left wall. The right wall, however, provides the viewer with one of the most detailed images of the Etruscan underworld, where a rocky terrain is inhabited by demons. These figures seem to have different jobs: the black-skinned demon all the way to the right attempts to advance to the left, while a blue-skinned demon protects the passageway by holding up snakes in both hands. To the left, a dark-skinned demon seems to escort or even push a woman (perhaps the deceased?) closer to the shores of a river where a skiff awaits. The overall composition is both familiar and unique – a visual expression of the wider Etruscan view of the underworld. This tomb is one of the few in Etruria that portrays an actual underworld setting. In fact, we see a detailed landscape where presumably a river and a rocky terrain meet. The underworld is painted as a place (*locus*) where figures move about on different levels (on the ground and on a large boulder above ground). Another work that does this is the Tomb of the Hunter in Tarquinia, which offers a glimpse of the outside world through a wafting curtain beyond which a deer grazes. These examples not only confirm the importance of landscape painting in Etruria, but also give us an idea of the “kinds” of paintings that may have existed in secular buildings (which neighboring Romans could have easily seen). In short, the Roman love for landscape painting may have pictorial roots in Etruscan wall painting traditions.

Processions

Processions, as Peter Holliday (1990) has pointed out, emerge early in Etruscan art and can be seen in the depiction of funerary, festive, ritualistic, and civic events. Processions of magistrates holding insignia occupy a special place in Etruscan art, especially in wall painting. At Tarquinia, they appear as early as the first quarter of the fourth century BCE (e.g., the Tomb of the Pygmies; Steingraber 1985: no. 97), then in the Tomb of the Shields (325 BCE; Steingraber 1985: no. 109), and in at least six others from following decades (the Mercareccia (325 BCE; Steingraber 1985: no. 87), Bruschi (300 BCE), Cardinal (250 BCE; Steingraber 1985: no. 54), Typhon (250 BCE; Steingraber 1985: no. 118; see further, Cristofani 1971), and Alsina (third century BCE; Steingraber 1985: no. 39) tombs).¹ Even the Hescanas Tomb from the region of Orvieto (end of fourth BCE) displays a rich mixture of underworld figures within a procession (Feruglio 2003).

In the Tomb of the Shields, one of the largest tombs to date at Tarquinia, the founder, Larth Velcha appears in a procession led by lictors on the entrance wall (Maggiani 2005: 115–132, esp. 120; Torelli 2012, which also includes a

discussion of the tomb's innovative painting style). His achievements as a *zilath* are listed on the wall where numerous inscriptions detail the historical importance of his family. These inscriptions, seen in other tombs of this period, literally spell out Larth's name and rank followed by political and religious titles, which provide a sort of Etruscan "*cursus honorum*" for the viewer (Steingraber 2006: 189, 254). Larth wears a white garment with a deep red border on the bottom – his size is exaggerated to emphasize his importance. Two musicians and a slave stand behind him; the slave is hunched over from carrying the *sella curulis* on his shoulders. No doubt these events were chosen for tomb décor precisely because they galvanize, commemorate, and celebrate the political accomplishments of the deceased and his family (Larth's, wife, father and mother also appear in the tomb). But they also blend his civic role with scenes of funerary rituals and underworld winged figures.

Another good example of this blending is found in the Bruschi Tomb, which belonged to the Apunas family (Vincenti 2007; 2009). The tomb has suffered from extreme damage, both before and after its excavation, but survives in a drawing by Gregorio Mariani (Figure 17.3). Three different processions containing a handful of magistrates and lictors are depicted. On the back wall, Vel Apna wears the *toga praetexta* and his size is exaggerated, like that of Larth Velcha in the Tomb of the Shields (Vincenti 2009). Looking at this scene reminds us that Pliny claimed the purple-bordered toga was an Etruscan invention (Pliny *Natural History* 8.74; 9.36).

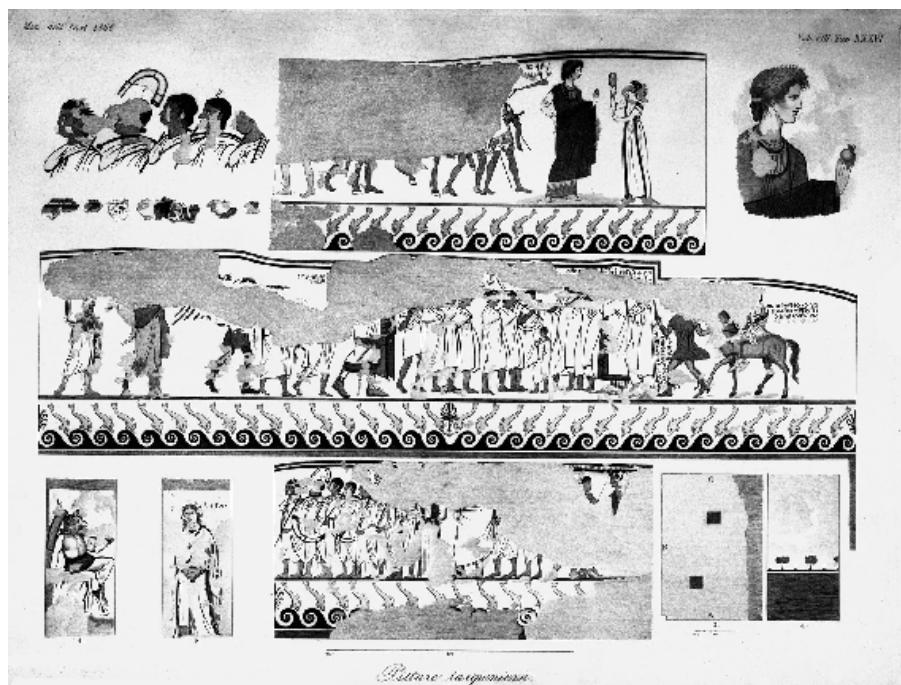


Figure 17.3 Bruschi Tomb, c.300 BCE, drawing by Gregorio Mariani, 1864. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

A small child also appears amongst the procession on the back wall, lending a sort of “family quality” to the scene. One need only look at the Augustan *Ara Pacis* for similar depictions and, indeed, the parallels are striking: a formal procession with magistrates and the presence of a child emphasizing the visual rhetoric of family lineage. The artist also depicts the crowd with a variety of profiles at different depths, as seen in other Etruscan procession scenes (on the connection between Etruscan and Roman art, especially regarding the *Ara Pacis*, see below and Conlin 1997: 21–25; for more on Etruscan processions and their legacy to Rome, see Maggiani 1998 and 2005; Naso 2001: 21–27; and Menzel and Naso 2007).

The Tomb of the Meeting (Steingraber 1985: no. 58), which dates to the first half of the third century BCE, depicts three separate processions of magistrates holding fasces, lances, axes and rods on the back and left walls (Figure 17.4). These symbols, so familiar to us from Roman art, no doubt have roots in Etruria, as Menzel and Naso have shown (Naso 2001; Menzel and Naso 2007: 30–4; see also Tassi Scandone 2001 for a thorough study of this topic). The rods shown in this tomb may allude to the *imperium militia* – that is, the final battles between Tarquinia and Rome that ended in 281 BCE (Menzel and Naso 2007; Steingraber 2006: 255). The predominant theme of various magistrates in procession embodies a clear political and social message. Gone is the banquet scene so vital from the Archaic period onward, as well as the demons that populate tombs from the late fifth to third centuries BCE. In fact, there are no women in this tomb – a clear contrast to the paintings from previous centuries. In effect, as Menzel and Naso have pointed out, this is the only tomb or sarcophagus depicting a procession of magistrates that does not include subjects of the Underworld.² Clearly the aim was to record the deceased’s political and civic role in his community. In fact, it is just this aspect that is so successfully conveyed, to the point where the artist has depicted a lictor looking back at the magistrate – a recognizable element on the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, but known in Etruria some 250 years prior. Torelli (2012: 23–24) describes this man as the *lictor proximus*, whose job it was literally to face the magistrate. The political and masculine orientation of this tomb’s imagery, therefore, suggests a different climate in the funerary repertoire of wall painting at Tarquinia offers a convincing Etruscan predecessor to Roman art.



Figure 17.4 Tomb of the Meeting, c.250 BCE. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

The procession scenes share common compositional ingredients: the deceased is preceded by magistrates, mainly lictors who hold insignia, and/or musicians; he is surrounded by a procession; there are various levels often represented to show depth in addition to varying profiles, including three-quarter frontal views, and figures simply turning back to look at the tomb's protagonist (see [Figure 17.4](#)). That these characteristics represent the ability of the painters is evident. But more importantly they force us to recognize that the painters were recording what they saw in life: these processions took place and must have been a vital part of Etruscan society.

The connection that such procession scenes project between Etruscan and early Roman art is of particular interest here as it is a topic that has by no means been fully explored. When we look at the quintessential Roman procession in works such as the Ara Pacis, it is difficult to deny their Etruscan predecessors. Pallottino, for example, saw the Etruscan figures in processions as having “historical value [that illustrated] the transition from Etruscan art

traditions to Roman art” (1952: 128). In her detailed analysis of the processions of the Ara Pacis, Diane Conlin also argued for a closer look at the Etruscan-Italic impact upon Augustan art as opposed to the Greek (1997: 21–25). She writes: “The tenacious grip of the Greek master theory continues to dominate not only more specialized studies of Augustan imagery, but more importantly, many discussions in popular Roman art handbooks” (1997: 24).

Historical Narratives and Battles

Other important themes found in Roman painting that appear earlier in Etruscan art include historical narratives, battle scenes or duels, portraits, and mythology – all of which are present in the François Tomb from Vulci (Cristofani 1976; Maggiani 1983; Buranelli 1987; Holliday 1993a). This large multi-chambered tomb, decorated in a remarkable style, dates to the second half of the fourth century BCE and preserves one of the earliest historical wall paintings in all of Italy. The founder of the tomb, an Etruscan aristocrat named Vel Saties, commissioned paintings that depicted both important Etruscan heroes (presumably in a sixth century BCE battle against Rome) as well as scenes from the Trojan cycle (including the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners) (see further, [Chapter 25](#)). That Vel Saties and his so-called son (?) are juxtaposed with Nestor and Phoenix on the opposite wall is befitting of this elegantly robed Etruscan aristocrat. Pallottino (1952: 120) described the depiction of Vel Saties as the first full-length portrait in Western art. The shading, subtle nuances of light and dark and the *sfumatura*, moreover, could all be characterized as belonging to a chiaroscuro style, one that also appears in the Tomb of the Shields (see Torelli 2012: 15–17).

One of the François Tomb’s back chambers depicts painted colored slabs (known already in the Greek world by the end of the fifth century BCE) that bring to mind Roman First (or “Masonry”) and Second Style paintings which flourished some 300 years after this tomb was painted (additional examples of the Masonry style appear in the Tomb of the Festoons at Tarquinia: Steingraber 1985; these motifs were also popular in Apulian tomb painting: Bertocchi 1964). How the Etruscans may have served as mediators of Greek innovations such as the Masonry Style is too often overlooked. This historical narrative, played out through an epic battle pitting Etruscans against Romans, not only serves to celebrate Etruscan supremacy, but may also demonstrate the kinds of paintings that must have existed in public venues. We can look to the early wall paintings of Rome, namely the Esquiline tomb, the façade of the Scipionic tomb and the Arieti tomb, dated between the third and first centuries BCE, for the possible descendants of these scenes (Coarelli 1988: 14; Holliday 1990: 89f.; Talamo 2010 offers an assessment of the Arieti tomb

since its recent restoration). Coarelli (1988), for example, describes the fragmentary frescoes in the Arieti tomb as historical scenes most likely with military connotations, given the presence of soldiers, although Holliday (1990) sees them as funerary processions with battle scenes.

4. Conclusion

This sampling of Etruscan wall painting serves as a starting point in recognizing various innovations and their potential influences on Roman painting styles and themes. Roman wall painting is regularly traced back to Greece, with hardly, if any, mention of the traditions that existed in the centuries prior among their close neighbors, the Etruscans. In his widely used textbook on Roman painting, Roger Ling states that the dominant influence on Roman painting was Greek, but he goes on to suggest that “it is not impossible that indigenous traditions had some effect upon the way in which the subjects were painted” (1991: 11). Yet much scholarship, entrenched within a nineteenth and twentieth century academic framework, sees the ancient Mediterranean world strictly in terms of Greeks and Romans. Although Steingraber, who has written many in-depth studies of wall painting in Etruria, suggests that some Etruscan tomb painters may have been Greek, he does not deny the unique Etruscan contribution to wall painting at large. This brings into question the presence of Greek artists in Etruria. There were, no doubt, Greek artisans in Etruria – this can be confirmed in the literature. What cannot be confirmed, or even really measured, is how much they impacted and even contributed to what we call Etruscan art (see further, Camporeale 2013). Determining the ethnic background of artists in the Mediterranean would be an impossible task and most likely inconclusive with respect to “defining the nationality” of an object or wall painting. Massimo Pallottino expressed this best when he wrote “art historians need not occupy themselves with the problem – abstract and insoluble at best – of the nationality of the artists” (1952: 15; on this issue see further, [Chapter 24](#)). What we can *carefully* trace and examine even during times of constant cross-pollination are style and subject matter (both common and unique) (see also [Chapter 25](#)).

Likewise, the role the Etruscans played in the cross-fertilization of Greek motifs and subject matter later absorbed by Rome is frequently ignored (a similar situation is seen in the scholarly tendency to overlook Etruscan architectural and technological achievements; see [Chapter 10](#)). When we consider the proximity of Rome to Etruscan cities such as Caere and Veii, we are confronted with the fact that Romans (and, in particular, Roman painters) must have been looking at Etruscan wall paintings as they entered Etruscan cities and acquired their towns and cemeteries. Indeed, given that Etruscans

artisans were painting well into the third century BCE, there must have been a continuous evolutionary process of painting techniques that were absorbed by these artists, as Pallottino, once again, reminds us:

Italian painting of the late Republic and of the Empire was bound to absorb and retain certain elements inherited from the early indigenous pictorial traditions, and amongst these the Etruscan tradition seems by far the most important in view of the influence it appears to have exercised on the pictorial art of other Italic races ... (1952: 21).

So, too, the Etruscan paintings left below ground give us an idea of the paintings that certainly existed above ground. These paintings – in temples, sanctuaries, shrines, civic buildings, and homes – should be envisioned when examining the early roots of Roman wall painting. One need only think of a definitive monument from the time of the Etruscan kings in Rome, namely, the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, atop the Capitoline Hill (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 4.52.5–6; Cassiodorus *Variae* 7.6.1; Pliny *Natural History* 35.157). It was the largest Etruscan temple ever built and the crowning glory of Rome at the end of the sixth century BCE. From the descriptions that survive of the terracotta cult statue supposedly made by Vulca, an Etruscan from Veii (Pliny *Natural History* 35.157), we are left to imagine how the interior and exterior paintings must have appeared (see further, [Chapter 24](#)). But that they existed is not disputed. After all, we know that the Romans were drawing upon Etruscan temples and atrium houses of early Etruria for inspiration, so the expectations would be the same for other areas of the visual arts. With further study of this topic we will be in a better position to understand the important legacy that Etruscan wall painters passed on to Rome in terms not only of techniques but also subject matter and style, as well as their contributions to wall painting in the ancient Mediterranean at large. If anything, we know that some Romans, including Pliny (*Natural History* 35.16–8), recognized the value and long tradition of this art form in Etruria.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Steingraber 1985 is the first comprehensive study of Etruscan wall painting and includes all the known tombs in Etruria up until 1985. This extensive volume has served as a foundation manual for all scholars interested in Etruscan wall painting. There are a number of valuable scholarly articles that have shed much light on the subject matter painted on tomb walls. The question of the origin of Etruscan wall painting is thoroughly discussed by Naso 2010. Akerström 1981 examines the subject matter and stylistic characteristics of Etruscan tombs looking beyond Etruria, namely to Anatolia, for some fascinating parallels. Torelli 1999 discusses not only the tomb images, but also the tomb as a "liminal space" for the living and the dead. More tombs have been excavated outside of Tarquinia, allowing for a better understanding of wall painting in other Etruscan cities like Chiusi and its environs (see Minetti 2003). Steingraber 2006 offers a lengthy and up to date analysis of the larger picture of Etruscan wall painting and its place in the Mediterranean. This book also includes tombs that have been discovered since his 1985 publication and a thorough bibliography, timeline, and register of all the painted tombs, their location, discovery date and chronology. Some recent studies – such as Nagy 2013, who highlights the genre of landscape painting, and Torelli 2012, who examines the wall paintings of the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods – offer vital insight into otherwise often neglected subject matter. Regarding the similarities of Etruscan wall painting and Roman art, Conlin 1997 and Menzel and Naso 2007 convincingly take up this argument.

NOTES

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- 1 The Tomb of the Mercareccia, the Tomb of the Cardinal, and the Tomb of the Alsina were documented to have had processions with magistrates, but severe damage or total destruction has eliminated these tombs from further analysis.
- 2 Even the damaged back wall appears not to have any underworld images in its scenes: Menzel and Naso 2007: 35. In the Tomb of the Shields, winged figures appear at the entrance of the back room, and on the back wall of the Bruschi Tomb, a winged demon can be seen in the crowd (Menzel and Naso 2007: 36).

CHAPTER 18

Votives in their Larger Religious Context

Helen Nagy

1. Introduction¹

Livy claimed that the Etruscans were “...a people more than any other dedicated to religion, the more as they excelled in practicing it” (Livy 5.1.6). Although the historian may be exaggerating a bit, other Roman sources also stress the Etruscans’ preoccupation with foretelling the future and with ritual. The *libri rituales* of the Etruscans are now gone (van der Meer 2011: 78–81). Only a few longer texts – the third- to second-century mummy wrapping from Zagreb (the *liber linteus*), the fifth-century clay Capua Tile, and the Brontoscopic Calendar – written in Etruscan or translated from the original – survive to give a flavor of these famous books.² The three are essentially religious calendars. The Capua tile and the *liber linteus* specify rituals to be performed on any given day of the year, whereas the Brontoscopic calendar, a sixth-century CE Byzantine translation by “John the Lydian” of a lost Latin translation from the Etruscan by Figulus, is a divinatory calendar intended to aid priests in interpreting thunder (Turfa 2012: 3–16).

The Capua tile and the *liber linteus* also name numerous gods, but neither specifies the location of the rituals to be performed. Nevertheless, the *liber linteus* prescribes specific sacrifices, such as animal sacrifice and food offerings, and provides instructions for the proper performance of cultic activities, including the time of day (morning) for burned offering to Veiovis (Rix 1997: 391–398; Turfa 2012: 23–25). It names several types of priests and specifies the sacred acts and the places where rituals were to take place (van der Meer 2007: 80; Belfiore 2010: 53). Nowhere does it indicate anything regarding the handling or disposition of votive objects. The closest specification in the *liber linteus* may be, “prepare the incense, offer with the ceremonial vessel these breads” (Turfa 2012: 24).

Much has been written about the famous bronze model of a sheep’s liver, discovered in 1877 near Piacenza (van der Meer 1987; de Grummond 2013: 542). The surface is divided into 40 compartments containing names of divinities. The object seems to have served as a learning tool for a would-be haruspex. While of exceptional importance for the understanding of Etruscan haruspicy, the Piacenza liver is not a ritual text, per se.

The written sources suggest that offerings during ceremonies needed to be blood or burned offerings, incense, food (such as bread), and, probably, liquid. These offerings would be presented by the proper priests and attendants and accompanied by prescribed gestures and words and by music. Evidence for these activities survives in the decorations on a small number of Etruscan mirrors as well as in wall paintings and relief sculptures. This chapter highlights the place of votive offerings within the religious rites of the Etruscans with special emphasis on the role of votives in sanctuaries.

2. The Votive Offering

A votive object is a physical (in most cases durable) reminder of a pact between the divine and the person (or group) making the offering, or a memento of a sacrifice performed (van Straten 1981: 69). A votive, then, is essentially the materialized form of a prayer, a petition for aid or thanks for a wish granted. The offering is frequently preceded by a formal vow, especially if it is of a public nature, such as the erection of a temple, like the one made by Thefarie Velianas, the ruler of Caere mentioned in the Pyrgi gold plaques (see below). Far more common are the smaller, tangible gifts offered by individuals or family groups. This second category is the primary subject of this chapter. Votive objects come in many materials, forms and sizes. They may be made for the votive purpose, or be a treasured personal object. They may be inscribed, although this is less frequent in Etruscan than in Greek and Roman practice. They are found in a variety of sacred locales, including temple complexes, near altars, but just as often in caves, by springs, and in groves (Edlund 1987; Edlund-Berry 2013: 557–565). Votive objects have also been discovered in “deposits” containing ritual material, remains of sacrifices and various dedications. These include those formed as part of the foundation or re-foundation of a building or precinct, propitiation deposits, and obliteration deposits (Bonghi Jovino 2006: 31–46; Glinister 2006: 54–70). The very number of Etruscan votives, especially the less costly varieties made of terracotta, is daunting.

Types of Votive Offerings

A large category of votives consists of perishable materials and therefore survives only in literary sources or in artistic depictions. These include animals, food, liquids, wax, and even human hair. Evidence for the latter occurs in ancient Greece (van Straten 1981: 90–91), but has yet to be found in Etruria. Animals were sacrificed at the time of communal worship, and liquids were also mainly used in this context. The Pian di Civita excavations at

Tarquinia, for example, have revealed vegetable and animal offerings including turtles, dogs, and carved deer antlers (Bonghi Jovino 2010: 7–16). There is also evidence for votives made of quasi-perishable materials, such as wooden figures and objects,³ as well as for fabrics (Meyers 2013, and see also [Chapter 21](#)). Even more frequently deposited were the tools used in the production of textile products that functioned in the context of cult (Gleba 2009: 64–84). Bronze, terracotta, and ceramic objects make up the bulk of extant votive materials, but personal gifts may also include luxury items, such as jewelry of gold and silver (see [Chapter 19](#)), and objects made of ivory and amber.

Costly gifts include large-scale sculptures of bronze. The famous Chimera from Arezzo, inscribed as a gift of (to) Tinia (Zeus), is one of the few that survive (Turfa 2006: 92). Less costly bronzes include figurines (Scarpellini 2013: 1027–1040), vessels, *thymiateria* (incense burners) and other items, such as an incense shovel in New York (De Puma 2013: 160, no. 5.22).

Thymiateria, incense shovels, certain textiles, and numerous types of vessels belong to a category of votive objects that have (or had) a function in the performance of the cult before becoming a divine “gift.” Among finds of this type discovered thus far, the most impressive example of a ritual dedication of ceremonial objects is the votive deposit excavated in front of Building beta in the monumental sacred area of the Civita at Tarquinia. (Bonghi Jovino and Chiaramonte Treré 1987: 59–70; Bagnasco Gianni 2013: 594–599, and [Chapter 7](#)). The deposit dates to the early seventh century and was offered to the goddess Uni. Three impressive items, a bronze axe-head, a decorated ceremonial shield and a ceremonial (or war) *lituus* trumpet were buried in alignment with the entrance. The trumpet and the shield were ritually made useless by being folded over several times. The high quality of the objects and their aristocratic associations indicate that the offering was made by a person of the highest rank. The skeleton of a child, around eight years old, was buried in line with the ditch containing the bronzes. That Building beta, an “altar temple,” was dedicated with great ceremony by a “king” on a very early sacred site is further supported by a child’s burial that dates back to the ninth century. The buried bronzes, a foundation deposit, thus attest to the importance of the ruler’s participation in the re-foundation of the sacred structure. A later foundation deposit was discovered at area alpha of the Civita at Tarquinia (Chiesa 2005: 327–330; [Chapter 7](#)).

Jewelry, personal objects and certain types of vessels also had former “lives” before being dedicated to the gods. Inscriptions frequently emphasize the transition of the object to its new status/purpose, as can be seen on the large early fifth-century Greek kylix discovered in the San Antonio sanctuary of Caere, attributed to Onesimos and Euphronios. An inscription in Etruscan on the foot of the vase indicates that at some point after its arrival in Etruria, it was dedicated to Hercle (unfortunately, the name of the dedicant is now

missing) (Maggiani and Rizzo 2005: 150–152). Numerous well-crafted and sumptuous Greek vases have also been found in Etruscan votive contexts (Osborne 2001: 277–295). Three such items were recovered at the Portonaccio sanctuary at Veii in the obliteration deposit of material from the temple itself. This context implies that the vessels were kept in the temple as prized objects for use in the cult and displayed as costly votives (Baglione 2011: 95–101).

Greek and Etruscan vases make up an important category of votives in Etruscan sanctuaries (Gran-Aymerich 1997; Maggiani 1997). Certain types, such as vessels used for libation rituals (*pateras*, *oinochoai*, and other containers of liquid or pouring vases), may have been manufactured specifically for cultic use. But many examples of service wares, plates, cups, etc., used for meals need not have been made specifically for a ritual function.

Most votives, however, were manufactured purely to serve as gifts to the gods. They are made of bronze or clay and range from fruits and other food products to animals, small building models and altars, and human figurines demonstrating a great variety of iconographic types. Offerings were presented on various occasions and to numerous divinities, especially those concerned with fertility (of the earth as well as of human beings), health, healing, and events associated with passage – coming of age, marriage, death/memory.

Anatomical votives, mainly of terracotta, are the most numerous of any category (Turfa 2004: 359–368; Recke 2013: 1068–1085). They were popular from the fourth century onward. Most sanctuaries accommodated some aspect of healing and care, especially in the later periods. Interpretations of their functions include the apparent pathological one, but few anatomical votives exhibit signs of disease. Kouroutrophic and healing aspects such as thanks for being healed and petitions for fertility or for the safety of infants are among the major functions of these *ex-votos*. Recently, Recke has suggested that votive torsos with open body cavities may have literally referred to surgical interventions. Another theory connects votives of certain body parts with the action toward or from the divine. For instance, ears may have indicated that the divinity heard the petitioner, or that the offrant was asking to be heard; eyes indicated a need to be seen by the divinity, while hands could indicate prayer (Recke 2013: 1076–1078).

Another significant sub-category of figural votives were the terracotta heads and busts (Figure 18.1) that often approach life-size proportions (Carpino 2013: 1012–1016). Generic representations of youthful male and female heads were often serially manufactured and derivative generations with variations in adornment, hair style and even some facial features could be produced just before firing (Nagy 2013: 994, 996, fig. 54.6). Numerous heads and busts, however, exhibit portrait-like features clearly intended to reflect the unique features of an individual (Carpino 2013: 1013, fig. 81). The large quantity of votive heads in deposits from the fourth to second centuries indicates that

worshippers sought to leave visual reminders of themselves, whether generically or as individuals.



Figure 18.1 Fragments of votive heads, fourth – second centuries BCE. Terracotta. From the Manganello Sanctuary, Caere.

Photo: By permission of V. Bellelli.

In addition, offerings could be given as petitions *do-ut-des* (“I give so you may give”), a primary concept in the relationship between the worshipper and the divine in Etruria, as in much of the ancient Mediterranean world. Very often the votive object is a reminder of a gift already given or the expression of a formal vow (*votum*), as seen in the famous gold plaques from Pyrgi which commemorate a gift of gratitude to Uni/Astarte dedicated by Thefarie Velianas, king of Caere (Turfa 2012: 24–25).

Votive Offerings with Inscriptions

Public votive of thanks

Three gold plaques were discovered in 1964 in area C at Pyrgi near Temple B (c.500) in a special enclosure made in the third century for the purpose of their deposition (see [Figure 14.2](#)). They were carefully folded along with the nails once used to affix them, perhaps to the Temple of Uni/Astarte (Temple

B) (Colonna 1970). Of the three tablets, two are in Etruscan and one in Phoenician. The two long inscriptions (Etruscan and Phoenician) provide the name of the donor, Thefarie Velianas, ruler of Caere, who established a temple and/or statue in gratitude to Uni/Astarte for her support during the third year of his reign. Both close with the vow "... may the years [of the statue?] be as many as the stars" (Bonfante and Bonfante 1985: 74–78). While the long Etruscan inscription is less specific on the exact dates of the gift and of the event that precipitates it, the religious activities that took place in giving thanks to the goddess are carefully described. The shorter Etruscan inscription also refers to specific rituals that are to take place annually to purify the temple.

The Pyrgi plaques not only provide important information regarding the connection between a major votive gift and ritual, but they also highlight the importance of the proper timing and recurrence of the religious routines that must be maintained as part of the votive process. In other words, a votive gift of this magnitude was not a one-time gift, but it became part of an ongoing ritual activity. Temples and cult statues are the most costly of the public votives and the most closely tied to ritual practices. As Turfa (2012: 25) remarks, "They [the plaques] represent the most lavish version of the votive dedication, the rarely preserved offerings of a ruler."

Private gifts

Inscriptions on private votive objects may include information on the donor, his/her family, the occasion of the gift, and the recipient divinity of the offering. Some represent thank offerings and others functioned as petitions, but the majority did not specify the occasion for the votive. They range from expensive to very humble objects, but even the most insignificant pottery fragment, when inscribed, speaks eloquently of someone's belief in and respect for the efficacy of the votive transaction. Dedicatory inscriptions usually follow a formula using the verbs *mulvani-* or *tur-* (Maras 2009; [Chapter 14](#)).

An elegant statue base of considerable proportions was recently discovered in the "quadrangular structure" at the Campo della Fiera at Orvieto (Stopponi 2011: 37–42; Stopponi 2013: 637–638). An inscription along its upper edges proclaims the following: "Kanuta, freedwoman (?) of the gens Larecena, wife of Aranθ Pinie, gave to the *Thluxva* of the *Marveθ* (of the seat/residence) in the *Faliaθere/Faliaθera* [in the celestial (place)]" (Stopponi 2011: 42). This base proudly displays the name of the donor, Kanuta, her family name, Laracena, and the fact that she is a freedwoman married to Aranθ Pinie. It is clear that Kanuta was very proud of her expensive gift to the *Thluxva* divinities. The top surface of the base retains holes for lead dowels to support a statue (now lost). It was probably made of bronze and could have been

inscribed with the name of the divinity receiving the gift. Smaller, uninscribed bases with multiple fittings for figurines were also discovered at the same time (see below). Kanuta's gift is the largest among these and she made sure that everyone in her community knew who had given it. Had Kanuta held a religious office at the sanctuary, she would surely have noted it. Unfortunately, the reason for her gift, be it a petition or thanks, is not addressed.

Bronze objects are more likely to be inscribed than less costly clay or terracotta ones. The inscriptions frequently indicate the name of the person making the dedication and the name of the recipient divinity. Some, as the one on the statue base discussed above, provide the family name and, in the case of some women, their husband's name. In more than one case, a person dedicated the object on behalf of a family member (see below examples of dedications by mothers on behalf of their offspring).

Figurines are often inscribed on parts of their bodies, or on the base to which they were attached. Often, as in the case of Kanuta's base, it is impossible to connect a figure with its support. In other instances, a statuette could be cast in one piece with its rectangular base. This is the case with an athlete (c.400–350) from Sarteano; the inscription, incised on the upper surface of the base, reads, "Vel Sapu gave this to Selvans" (Bonfante 1990: 47). The figure may represent a generic athlete, or Vel Sapu himself. A female figurine, identified as a dedicant by her gesture, is also accompanied by an inscription on her rectangular base, "Titne Alpa dedicated. Of the divinities, to Thufitha" (Cristofani 1985: 272, no. 61). While it is possible that the statuette represents Titne Alpa in the act of offering, it is impossible to know for sure.

Although figurines of divinities can be recognized by their attributes, inscriptions often name them as well as the person who dedicated them. Two well-preserved bronze figurines from Cortona illustrate this point. They resemble one another in pose, proportions and the boots they are wearing, but one, Culsans (perhaps a proto-Janus), has two faces and bears the inscription on his left thigh, "Vel Quinto of Arntia dedicated the gift(?) to Culsans" (Cristofani 1985: 285–286 no. 104). Selvans has a normal head and wears a feline headdress. The inscription on his left thigh is nearly identical to that on Culsans's, except that it names Selvans (Silvanus) as the recipient of the gift (Cristofani 1985: 286, no. 105). The same person dedicated both statuettes, which were made by the same artist. Because the two were discovered together, they must have been offered at shrines close to one another.

Two modest clay pots offered by L. Tolonios at Veii present a slightly different situation. Tolonios dedicated a small *olpe* to Menerva at the Portonaccio sanctuary in the late fourth century. An inscription incised on the shoulder of the vase reads "L. Tolonio(s) ded. (et) Menerva" (Tolonios dedicated to Menerva) (Nagy 2011: 116–7). Its counterpart was discovered in a pit containing a votive deposit at the Campetti sanctuary. The nearly

identical inscription, this time incised prior to firing, reads “Crere L. Tolonio d” or “dedicated to Ceres” (Torelli 2000: 630, no. 298). Clearly, Tolonios frequented both sanctuaries and perhaps wanted to record the fact that he had participated in a libation ritual at both. The objects are both single-handled pouring vessels, ones connected with this type of ritual.

Devotees are mostly depicted as generic male and female figures. They fall into two major categories, dedicants and *orantes* (praying) figures, but some can be identified more specifically as having held religious office. A bronze statuette of a haruspex in the Vatican Museums (Cristofani 1985: 272, no. 60), for example, wears the typical costume of this office: it consists of a conical hat tied under the chin, a tunic, and a mantle over the left shoulder, brought around to the right and fastened with a fibula over the chest. The inscription on the garment over the left leg identifies Vel Sveitus as the donor of the object that probably represents him.

Offerings by devoted mothers tend to specify that their gifts were made on behalf of their children. A group of third century bronzes discovered at Montecchio in 1746, for example, includes a *thymiaterion* and a large statuette of a pudgy boy holding a duck, both inscribed as dedications to Thufitha, a divinity connected with fertility and care (Cristofani 1985: 299–300, no. 128; Scarpellini 2013: 1032, fig. 57.8). The inscription on the right leg of the child reads, in rough translation: “given by Velia Fanacnal to Thufitha, a gift offered on behalf of the son- from the community of (?) Tlenache” (*TLE* 652; Maras 2009: 84–86). A statuette of a young Aplu (Apollo) in the Louvre displays a similar inscription on its left leg, “I am the statue (dedicated to) Spulare Artemis (that) Fasti, (wife) of Ruifri gave on behalf of her son, well deserving” (Bonfante and Bonfante 1985: 157, no. 37; Cristofani 1985: 284, no. 100). The dedication is to Artimi (Artemis), but the figure obviously depicts Aplu wearing a laurel wreath, not the deserving son. An easy explanation is that the gift was on behalf of the son, therefore the statue represented the brother of the goddess

Most anatomical votives are made of terracotta, a material that allows for easy reproduction. Asking for a cure or giving thanks for the same is a personal act. For the most part these objects are not inscribed, but there are some notable exceptions. These include the offering of a knee by Vel Tiples at the sanctuary of the Ara della Regina at Tarquinia (Comella 1982: no. D9Fr. 1, 115, pl. 77^c), and the votive uteri from the Fontanile de Lagnisina sanctuary at Vulci, inscribed with “Vei,” the name of the Etruscan version of Demeter, a goddess associated with fertility (Turfa 2006: 101). The inscription on Vel Tiples’s knee (*alce: vel: tiples*) appears along the upper edge of the piece and was incised prior to firing. This makes it unique unless the dedicant intended to offer identical votives more than once. The intention, nevertheless, is clear: Vel Tiples had a bad knee and was probably asking for help. Let’s hope he found a cure.

Large numbers of inscribed pottery and pottery fragments have come to light in excavations of sanctuaries. It is sometimes problematical to distinguish votive objects from vessels used in religious cult. Here the context of the find can be of help. For example, a fragment of an open vessel, inscribed “Unial” (of Uni (Juno)) was discovered near Temple B at Pyrgi (Agostiniani 2013: 465–466, fig. 22.10). Even though the inscription identifies the object as belonging to a goddess, its find spot suggests that it was part of the sanctuary’s service rather than a votive dedication. Agostiniani (2013: 464–466) offers further examples of inscribed dedications on vases.

Finally, an unusual inscribed votive object, a weight measure from the fourth century deserves mention. It was discovered in the sacred area of S. Antonio at Caere, a sanctuary dedicated to Hercle (Moretti Sgubini 2001: II.B.5.2, 153). The oval-shaped object is made of bronze with a lead center and has a ring on top for suspension. Ten lines of inscription run vertically around it. The complex text has resulted in at least two transcriptions, but it is possible to decipher its basic content. The dedication is to Turms (Hermes), god of commerce, and the gift was given by Vel Uc(u)s, son of Luvχumes, who performed the dedication in the city in the Masan(?) of Hercle. The item is identified and even its weight seems to be given (Iic = 286.5 grams: Becker 2013: 356), followed by two names and ending in the specific date of the offering “in the year of the zilath (magistrate) Larθ Nulaθe.” Vel Ucus makes it clear that the object was offered to Turms in the shrine of Hercle and emphasizes the weight of the measure and the exact date of its dedication. The occasion for the gift is not specified, but the object is a symbol of Vel Ucus’s occupation, suggesting that he was grateful for the success of his business.

While Etruscan votive inscriptions may not be as numerous, nor as informative as their Greek counterparts, they provide valuable information about both dedicants and recipients, as well as to why such offerings were made in the first place.

Representations of Ritual Activities

Many votives serve as “silent texts” on aspects of ritual activities. Among these are figurines of attendants (e.g., musicians and participants bearing libations vessels and or items used in certain rituals), representations of divinities sacrificing, scenes of sacrifice, divinities in shrines with or without attendants, and small votive altars (*arulae*) (Nagy 2000: 3–22).

Examples from the Vignaccia sanctuary at Caere illustrate all of these types. A votive terracotta relief now in Siena (Nagy 1994: 216, fig. 19.7) depicts two identical female figures enclosed in a *naiskos* (shrine). They are flanked by two small musicians, one playing the auloi (double flutes), the other a small lyre. They indicate a ritual event or the presence of a divinity. Musicians of

the types shown in the Siena relief also occur in Greece and in the Near East (Nagy 1994: 214, 216). The instruments in such contexts are always the same and may stand for the “voice” of the divinity (Bittel 1963: 20). The musicians on the Siena relief are rendered on a smaller scale than the female figures, who should be interpreted as divinities, or a duplicated divinity, perhaps in the form of statues in a temple. In any case, the musicians appear in their service. Another relief plaque from the Vignaccia, now in Boston ([Figure 18.2](#)), represents a scene of sacrifice. Fragments of identical compositions now in Berkeley (Nagy 1994: 211–212) show that this composition was also framed by architectural elements. It shows a sacrifice taking place at an altar in front of a fruit-bearing tree. On the right a draped female proffers a patera over the altar, as if to indicate that she is pouring a sacrificial libation. To emphasize this idea, a horned quadruped lurks behind the woman. On the left a smaller figure plays the auloi, indicating another element of the ritual. A scene of sacrifice depicted on a Praenestine mirror, now in Florence (Pieraccini 2011: 130, fig. 5), also depicts a sacrifice performed by a priest. In both representations, all of the essential elements of the real life ritual are present: location, priest or priestess, altar, attendant, sacrificial animal, and libation.



Figure 18.2 Terracotta relief with Artumes sacrificing a ram, fourth – third century BCE. Terracotta. From the Vignaccia sanctuary, Caere. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 88.364.

Photo: Photograph © [2015] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Various elements of this formula, such as musicians alone or in pairs, small votive altars, priests, priestesses, or the divine recipients, animals, and the ubiquitous figures offering libations are meant to recall and stress the idea of the ritual. The specifics vary according to the cult. For example, female figures bearing small piglets or torches suggest a chthonic cult, as do

miniature pig figurines. And in some sanctuaries, such as the Vignaccia, examples of all types have been discovered (Nagy 1988).

Archaeological Contexts

Very few votive objects have been discovered in their original contexts except for foundation deposits, such as the one from area alpha at Tarquinia (Chiesa 2001: 327; Chiesa 2005: 327–330; Bonghi Jovino 2006: 36; and [Chapter 7](#)) which contained two impasto *olpai* which had probably served in the ritual and then were subsequently buried in the foundation of the wall. Even foundation deposits can be secondary, if they mark the re-founding of a sacred area, such as the deposit discovered inside the core of the altar at Veii (Nagy 2011: 115).

Depending on the evidence from a given site, votives can provide some information on aspects of cult. For instance, the large number (c.3000 pieces) of imported Greek oil lamps at the sanctuary of Gravisca, the port of Tarquinia, point to nocturnal rites to a chthonic divinity, perhaps Demeter (Colonna 1985: 143–144, 7.2D). The number of vessels inscribed in Greek with the name of Hera from the excavation at Caere led Mengarelli and subsequent scholars to identify the site with that goddess. Furthermore, the fact that all of the inscriptions give the name of Hera in the nominative suggests that the items were not ordinary votives, but vessels used specifically in the cult itself (Gentili 2004: 309–39).

In 1869, a large cache of votive and other material was discovered in a deep cavity on the Vitalini Marini property at Caere (Luce 1920: 27–28; Nardi 1989: 55). The votive objects were mixed with architectural revetments and antefixes that were in a very good condition. Given the quality of the architectural terracottas, the temple at this site must have been quite important. However, nothing remains of its structure. The architectural elements suggest that it prospered from the sixth through the fourth centuries and that it had undergone at least one major renovation. In its fourth-century phase, large, vividly painted female and satyr head antefixes looked down on the visitors to this imposing shrine. The votives are mostly of terracotta and later in date, but it is very difficult to determine where and how they had been displayed originally. All of the material from this important find was sold and is now scattered in museums in Europe and the United States. It is now impossible to guess the composition of the votive types and their original number. Situations such as this one are, unfortunately, common (see further, [Chapter 30](#)), making it very difficult to determine the rituals practiced at such sites. How did the objects end up in the cavity and why? The Vitalini Marini find is typical of an obliteration deposit where architectural and votive material is removed from a temple about to be destroyed or “deconsecrated”

and is hidden in a cave, a disused well, or a hole dug for the purpose (Bonghi Jovino 2006: 31–46; [Chapter 12](#)). There is at least one ritual we know that occurred at sites such as the Vitalini-Marini, the obliteration deposit of the sacred material. One can imagine this ritual accompanied by prayers, liquid, and perhaps even blood sacrifice and music and chanting.

Although many sanctuaries shared the fate of the Vitalini Marini temple, fortunately there are sacred compounds that are better preserved and that can provide contexts for votive objects. The Portonaccio sanctuary at Veii functioned as an extramural sanctuary of long duration that served a major city. Built near a city gate, it included a major temple, a shrine, several altars, a large pool, a cistern and water channels (Nagy 2011: 114–116; [Chapter 12](#)). The site yielded a rich variety of votive objects, including bronze and terracotta figurines, large terracotta votive sculptures, pottery and some small objects. Many of the votives bear inscribed dedications that include the names of donors, some famous. We can visualize the Portonaccio sanctuary by the gate on a major road, dominated by a temple with large acroterial sculptures, a shining pool of water on its flank, altars and channels connecting to an earlier shrine and a cistern and probably smaller altars and large votive sculptures dotting the open spaces. Along comes a citizen of Veii, about to leave the city, who stops in to offer a prayer and a gift, perhaps asking for safe return, or success in a military engagement. He leaves a little memento of his prayer, a small terracotta statuette of a warrior. Similar figurines, which number close to 100, have been found at the site and are now kept in the storeroom of the Villa Giulia Museum (Vagnetti 1971: 180; Nagy 2013: 998–999).

A re-foundation deposit inside the core of the sanctuary's large altar contained very early material, suggesting that these humble, venerable objects like the "enthroned hunter" were worthy of rededication (Nagy 2011: 115, fig. 3). The area around the large altar also yielded a variety of later votive objects (Colonna 2002), while the cistern was filled with votive and other material as part of an obliteration deposit. Its contents included a variety of votive materials, bronzes, pottery, 194 spindle whorls, and even an enigmatic circular terracotta object surmounted by figurines of two elephants and a representation of Cerberos (Ambrosini 2005: 189–207).

The temple area produced the largest number of votive and architectural terracottas in three zones: as fill in the large pool by the temple, across the Roman road, and in the Cannetaccio zone below the temple, where they fell in a collapse of the temple's supporting platform. The context for this material is difficult to assess, but the pool and the deposit across the Roman road indicate that the dismantled material from the temple had been handled with care.

The votive gifts at the Portonaccio number in the thousands. None was found in its original location; they were mixed with fill or were deposited in wells or ditches dug for the purpose. They are excellent indicators of the composition of foundation and obliteration deposits and illuminate a ritual process that

served to preserve these sacred objects.

Recent excavations at the site of Campo della Fiera near Orvieto may shed additional light as to the display of bronze figurines in a sanctuary context. This site is thought by some scholars to be the location of the *Fanum Voltumnae*, the famed gathering place of the 12 Etruscan federations mentioned by Livy (4.23.5). The walled precinct of Temple A (Stopponi 2013: 632–50) includes structures in addition to the temple itself. Although plundered in 264, the area was rebuilt several times. Remains of altars, obliteration deposits and an intact treasury, as well as an offering table with holes for the attachment of statuary, provide evidence for the extensive quantity, quality and variety of votive offerings at the site. Inside a quadrangular structure built during the late Republican period as a depository for earlier votives (Stopponi 2011: 33–35) were several molded altars, blocks and bases with holes in their surfaces for the attachment of bronze statuettes. One of these still preserves three of the eight figurines it had supported (see [Figure 18.3](#)). They are rugged little things, but two are clearly shown in the act of praying or worshipping (e.g., in the *adorans* position) with their arms stretched open. The central figure is wrapped in a mantle and perhaps represents the object of veneration, a statue of an earlier period that may have been displayed in the sanctuary (Stopponi 2011: 34–35). This find suggests that bronze figurines, at least, could be arranged to represent an actual act of worship.



Figure 18.3 Figurines still in their original stone base, fourth – third century BCE. Bronze. From the Campo della Fiera, Orvieto.

Photo: Stopponi 2011/Courtesy of Simonetta Stopponi, University of Perugia.

Another site that offers evidence about aspects of cultic activity is Area C, a *sacellum* or “little sanctuary,” in the northern precinct of Pyrgi (Colonna 1970: 587–600; Baglione and Beelli Marchesini 2013). It is located in the enclosure for Temple B and shares a foundation wall with it. The ritual demolition of the area occurred in the third century, after the founding of the Roman colony on the site. This is where the famous gold tablets, discussed above, were deposited in a specially made enclosure attached to *sacellum* C. The enclosure was made of fragments of architectural elements from the dismantled Temple B. The deposition of the gold plaques was part of a larger obliteration ritual at Area C that included filling a deep well (*pozzo*) with

architectural remains, pottery fragments as well as debris from sacrifices that included bones of animals associated with chthonic divinities (Colonna 1970: 594–595). As Baglione and Belevi Marchesini (2013: 112) remark, “Here the construction of the new precinct for the golden tablets is highly meaningful, because it marks the reiteration of the sacred use of this specific and restricted area within the Pyrgi sanctuary.”

The votive deposits associated with the altars of the Southern sanctuary of Pyrgi include evidence for foundation, consecration, and obliteration rituals (Colonna 2006:132–142; Baglione 2013: 621–626; Baglione and Belevi Marchesini 2013: 113–126). Two foundation deposits that are connected with altars ν and λ point to a cult of Demeter, related to those in Magna Graecia. Deposit ρ of Altar ν contained a late Attic black figure amphora surrounded by 44 Attic vases of types used in libation rituals. These were arranged in circles according to specific ritual functions. Votive deposit κ , connected with altar λ , included, among other votives, some female busts and bronze and iron leaves pierced for being bound together, suggestive of oracular activities associated with mystery cults. Two Attic kraters, one inscribed *mi fuflunusura* (I am of Dionysos), support this aspect of the cult at this location. The votives in both cases are essential in identifying the origin and nature of the cults connected with the altars.

3. Conclusion

This chapter treats a single category of object that, in highly significant ways, bears witness to the intense religiosity of the Etruscans. By focusing on a few specific aspects of material evidence pertaining to votive offerings, it highlights the deeply religious significance inherent in what are often humble objects. A survey of a selection of certain Etruscan votive types associated with ritual imagery and inscriptions connected with votive figures or their bases confirms that many Etruscans liked to identify themselves as donors, often providing their family affiliations as extra support, and that they usually named the recipient divinity. Unlike lengthy Greek inscriptions, the specific reasons for their pleas are usually not explicitly expressed in writing, but often can be deduced from the nature of the objects themselves (e.g. a figurine of a swaddled baby). Generally the motivations for offering gifts to divinities are common to many cultures, but evidence, especially in the archaeological context, suggests that the Etruscans connected votives with rituals not only while the objects were in use, but also by creating special obliteration deposits to ensure their efficacy. Often, these deposits were closely connected to the focus of a cult, as in the case of the Pyrgi gold tablets and the altar deposits at Veii. It is evident that for the Etruscans once an object was placed in a sacred context, it was considered to be divinely imbued and had to be offered the

rituals proper to its disposition.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

De Grummond and Simon 2006 include essays on major aspects of Etruscan religion; most relevant to the topic of votives is the chapter by Turfa 2006, an accessible assessment for first-time readers on the subject. De Grummond and Edlund-Berry 2011 is recommended as a good collection of recent articles on the context of votive material and of the current status of some major excavations. *The Etruscan World* (Turfa 2013) is a large volume that contains 63 articles by respected Etruscan scholars. Many of these address topics related to this subject. While the articles are brief, they touch on the most recent state of scholarship and provide up-to-date bibliographies. Somewhat more specialized, but recommended, are the volumes by L. B. van der Meer (2010, 2011). Turfa 2012 is a fine assessment of the primary sources on Etruscan divination, especially of the Brontoscopic calendar. The bibliography attached to this chapter contains many good sources in languages other than English. The sources listed above include extensive bibliographies for the highly motivated scholar.

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all dates in this chapter are BCE.
- 2 Appendix B of de Grummond and Simon (2006: 191–218) provide a good selection of ancient texts (with English translations) on Etruscan religion.
- 3 Wood is a highly perishable material and few objects survive. Some examples, although not necessarily votive, are the magnificent seventh-century human head, probably from Vulci and now in Milan (Torelli 2000: 222–223, 586, no. 137), and a fifth-century wooden comb from a tomb at Spina (Torelli 2000: 579, no. 122).

CHAPTER 19

Etruscan Jewelry and Identity

Alexis Q. Castor

1. Introduction

When Etruscan jewelry is found, it is already displaced from its intended purpose. In a tomb, the typical archaeological context that yields gold, silver, ivory, or amber, the ornaments are arranged in a deliberate deposit intended for eternity. They represent neither daily nor special occasion costume, but rather are pieces selected and placed in ways that those who prepared the body, likely women, believed was significant for personal or ritual reasons. Indeed, there is no guarantee that the jewelry found on a body ever belonged to the dead. For an element of dress that the living regularly adapted to convey different looks, such permanence is entirely artificial. Today, museums house jewelry in special cases within galleries, further separating the material from its original display on the body. Simply moving beyond these simulations requires no little effort of imagination on the part of researchers who seek to understand how Etruscans used these most personal artifacts.

The approach adopted in this chapter draws on anthropological methods, especially those studies that highlight the changing self-identity and public presentation necessary at different stages of life. As demonstrated by contemporary examples, young adults can pierce various body parts, couples exchange rings at weddings, politicians adorn their lapels with flags, and military veterans pin on medals for a parade. The wearer can add or remove all of these accessories depending on how he or she moves through different political, personal, economic, social, or religious settings. Cultural anthropologists who apply this theoretical framework have access to many details of life-stage and object-use that are lost to us. Many answers about Etruscan jewelry will remain elusive because our interpretations rely on fragmentary, incomplete, and unrepresentative evidence. However, the scenarios prompted by these theories can move us beyond generic interpretations of jewelry as expressions of wealth, gender, or ethnicity categorized apart from other artifacts of the past. For example, the application of a life-stage model means that the first question asked about a piece of jewelry is not how or when it was made, but rather when might a man or woman have worn it. Scholars can use that prompt to interrogate further: how might the meanings differ if a child wore a ring versus if an adult male slipped

one on his finger? Etruscan women wore jewelry more flamboyantly than many of their Mediterranean neighbors, so what jewelry might a married woman wear? Did she mark certain achievements – her status as mother, widow, religious participant, mother-in-law, or grandmother – with different ornaments? Ancient cultures leave us with little direct testimony to answer these questions, but by raising them it is possible to consider the general parameters of costume and the ways Etruscan men and women could have used jewelry to highlight certain aspects of their public or social identity. Jewelry in precious materials certainly embodies elements of economic and social status, but what other signals could a wearer convey?

In this chapter, I will first survey the primary and secondary evidence for Etruscan jewelry, and then explore three aspects in greater depth: the evidence for life-stage use, the materiality and production of these ornaments, and the nineteenth-century discovery of jewelry and its role in the modern study of the Etruscans. Jewelry was never merely a decorative accessory in Etruria. Instead, its materials, manufacture, and manner of use communicated hints of the wearer's familial and social position that changed throughout his or her life.

2. Evidence for Etruscan Jewelry: Objects and Images

What jewelry survives? Where is it found? Most ancient jewelry known today is gold. Although gold was a precious metal in antiquity, the Etruscans occasionally decided to remove it from circulation and deposit it in a tomb. Early excavations in Etruscan centers such as Tarquinia and Caere (Cerveteri) revealed much of the gold and amber jewelry known today. Indeed, excitement about the skill of Etruscan goldsmiths helped to fuel further investigation of the ancient inhabitants of the region. Well-known examples of jewelry come from the seventh-century Regolini-Galassi tomb, uncovered in 1836. Precise details of the location of the gold ornaments are lacking but it is possible to determine that certain pieces of jewelry, such as the large, ornately decorated “fibula” now in the Vatican Museums (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: fig. 32), had solely a funerary use.

Funerary jewelry is best identified from the different techniques used to manufacture the pieces: usually, thin sheet gold was decorated mainly in relief rather than with added filigree and granulation, since those decorative procedures normally required harder construction. These ornaments would not stand up to significant use in life because of their flimsy nature, and so formed a costume for the dead, one that would communicate with the ancestors and underworld deities rather than the living (it has been proposed,

for example, that the Regolini-Galassi “fibula” may have been set on the face of the deceased rather than on her body; if so, it would have served as a gold mask, drawing light to the face (Etruscanning 2013)).

The qualities of gold that make it distinctive in life – its gleam, durability, and permanence – were also essential for the grave, but for various reasons, the living might retain actual objects the dead had worn in life. Jewelry may have had value as an heirloom, connecting and legitimizing one generation after another. When a line died out, the last family member may have taken a talisman to the grave, making it anachronistic to modern archaeologists.

Other jewelry, like amulets, could have had significance in ritual or magical associations that were not appropriate for the grave. Pure economic motivations – a family might not want to remove valuable goods permanently – could also have caused the substitution of less costly pieces, although the reverence for the dead and the afterlife may have made this rationale less common than modern observers might think. Alternatively, some ornaments may have been so closely linked with the wearer that there was no question that they would accompany the individual into the afterlife. Some jewelry may have been gifts from survivors and never worn by the deceased (Brück 2004). These, and likely many more reasons, could influence the choices about what types of jewelry to bury with the dead.

Most Etruscans did not decorate their dead with costly prestige objects like a gold necklace or a pair of bracelets, of course. Both the ancient deposition of jewelry and its discovery offer only random samples of actual use. As with any question concerning ancient demography, it is impossible get a real sense of how representative of elite groups are burials with gold jewelry. Certain periods and regions may have favored elaborate funeral rituals that included jewelry, but they would always be tied to broader social and ritual beliefs rather than pure economic or social reasons. A visitor to the jewelry collection at the Villa Giulia may think that they are seeing the full range of Etruscan personal ornaments, but it is impossible to be sure how representative the excavated material is of past practice.

The lack of full context for the majority of Etruscan jewelry constitutes a significant loss of information for archaeologists (see further, [Chapter 30](#)). Although funerary costume is artificial, study of the placement of jewelry, connection to males or females, understanding of age stages, and other aspects of the funerary ritual could offer a richer understanding of the significance of jewelry in the afterlife. We can hope that future discoveries will be able to supplement some of these lost data.

Sanctuaries provide another context in which archaeologists discover jewelry. Etruscan religion, like that of other ancient cultures, demanded regular offerings that sometimes included jewelry. Jewelry is found less commonly in votive deposits at Etruscan cult sites than in other Mediterranean religious

settings (on votives see [Chapter 18](#)). Greek sanctuaries regularly produce a whole range of bronze and iron personal ornaments along with an occasional discovery of gold or silver pieces, but Etruscan ritual spaces include only a few types of jewelry, such as bullae, discussed below, or clothing ornaments, such as pins. Other forms, like earrings, are represented less frequently and recovered in miscellaneous groups of votives or as stray finds in sanctuaries. The pins may have been fastened to a textile offering rather than dedicated as a personal ornament. Other categories of goods, such as mirrors, were apparently excluded from the range of acceptable offerings, and jewelry, objects worn on the body, or worn through a pierced ear (such as earrings), may not have been deemed appropriate. Some exceptions may have existed for certain rituals. For example, pins that were used to fasten garments, and thus did not touch the body, could be dedicated as part of the textile offering. For these reasons, a small hoard of Hellenistic gold jewelry discovered in 2003 in a ritual context at Poggio Colla was an exceptional find (Castor 2009). A pair of horseshoe earrings and five hoops, along with small necklace pendants, inlays of semi-precious stone, a lead bulla, and other objects comprised the hoard, which was probably originally collected in a small bag or box to keep the items together. The combination of multiple jewelry types and the pairs of earrings, rarely found together outside of a grave, suggest that this was a single deposit, although the pieces may have been collected from different women. It is impossible to know what motivated the decision to dedicate this jewelry when it was not a regular practice, but – as I have demonstrated elsewhere – some strong personal or even civic crisis may have played a role in the unusual offering.

To date, only one Etruscan domestic context has yielded jewelry. At Poggio Civitate (Murlo), a few broken and intact pieces of gold and silver jewelry were discovered in the debris layer of a building destroyed by fire around 600 BCE (De Puma 1981). Fragments of gold flowers and seeds originally belonged to an ornament that cannot be completely reconstructed, a segment of a gold diadem and two miniature silver fibulae. The context was sealed by the construction of the large Archaic monumental complex above it. Jewelry found in homes or as stray finds in settlements is usually understood to be lost or left behind by accident. It is difficult to draw secure conclusions from such archaeological contexts.

The primary evidence of jewelry, then, mainly derives from a funerary context and occasionally from a religious setting. Its retrieval is random and likely unrepresentative of real use, and, unfortunately, early excavations have robbed us of much contextual data. Other testimony, particularly secondary evidence for ornaments found in Etruscan art, does give some insight into jewelry use. As noted above, representations suggest that Etruscan men and women wore more jewelry than their neighbors. How accurately was jewelry portrayed in these representations? Larissa Bonfante (2003: 2) raised similar

questions in her study of Etruscan dress. Some examples are easy: when images show jewelry that survives in contemporary contexts, they clearly indicate an artist's awareness of the forms. The horseshoe earring type provides an example of this. The fifth- and fourth-century earring with a large arched shield combined with a group of spheres is well-represented by actual examples and in images. Terracotta votive busts show the greatest fidelity to the type, and museums regularly display a horseshoe earring next to a female figure wearing it (Nagy 1988). Similar attention to the details of necklaces with bullae or relief pendants can be found on contemporary sculpture, suggesting that the fourth century was a period during which artists and consumers were interested in highly accurate images of jewelry (Castor 2010).

Other depictions quickly become more complicated by the general stylistic conventions of the time. Etruscan art responds to the imagery of Greek, eastern Mediterranean, and Egyptian art in myriad ways, and the details of jewelry – its designs and manufacturing techniques – show this variety. Etruscan women shown in tomb paintings from the Archaic period (c.650–500) strongly resemble the ladies of Asia Minor and Greece with their disk earrings and bead chokers. While the Etruscans wore disk earrings in the sixth century, the painted versions are simple blue or red circles, the typical colors found in the art of Asia Minor and Greece, rather than gold. There is no hint of the intricate filigree and granulation found on surviving Etruscan disk earrings in the painted versions. An exception to the normal use of generic types in sixth-century tomb painting is found in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing from Tarquinia ([Figure 19.1](#)) (Steingraber 1985: no. 50). Here a female banqueter wears familiar, rather common, pieces – disk earrings and a choker – but her bracelets have animal-head terminals. Animal-head bracelets were indeed used by Etruscans but were also common in Asia Minor. So even though the type is more detailed than normal, it does not necessarily indicate an Etruscan form (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: fig. 174). Her male companion, however, sports a distinctive Etruscan-style necklace of ram's-head pendants. The jewelry is rendered in outline against his brown flesh, suggesting it was probably intended to represent either gold or amber pendants. Here there is no doubt that the artist is imitating a culturally specific jewelry type.

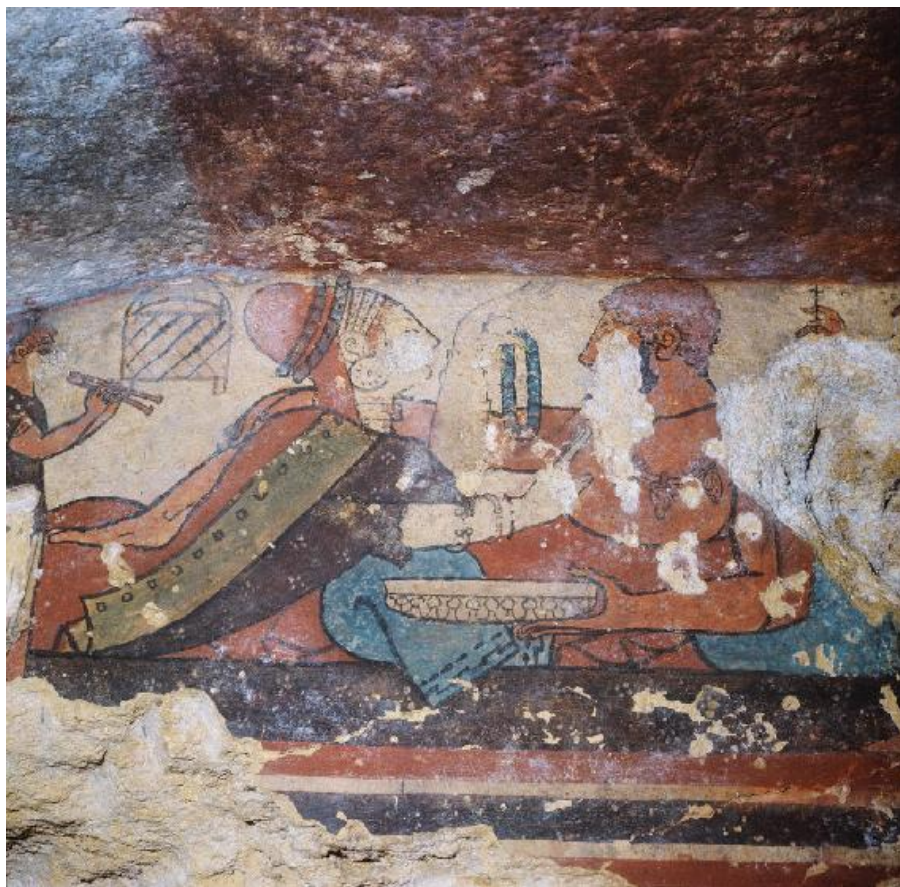


Figure 19.1 Banqueters and servants in the pediment of the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, c.530–520 BCE. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: SEF/Art Resource, NY.

Occasionally in the Archaic period, different media showed more attention to jewelry than is typically seen in painting. Terracotta sculpture, such as the seated male and female figures from the Tomb of the Five Chairs at Caere, included distinctively Etruscan comb fibulae, as well as large hoop earrings on the women and bracelets for both men and women (Bonfante 2003: figs. 14–16). Archaic jewelry itself offers images of some decked-out women. Small gold pendants from Caere showing kore figures with crowns and necklaces and amber pendants include a similar attention to jewelry (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: figs. 192–194). In general, however, the jewelry seen in Etruscan art from this period is neither plentiful nor does it regularly prioritize regional types.

A century later, jewelry becomes a key element of dress depicted in Late Classical art and the trend continues into the Hellenistic period. This is the era in which the votive busts with horseshoe earrings and bulla necklaces

described above were produced, and when other examples of Etruscan or Etrusco-Italic ornaments appear in contemporary art. A range of jewelry and artistic styles blend together in art at this time and examples of these will be discussed below.

Secondary evidence, therefore, requires its own contextual analysis and rarely can it simply serve as a stand-in for the gaps in primary evidence. Etruscan artists, and customers, generally paid more attention to details of dress and costume than Greeks and many nearby cultures, but even so the data remain highly lacunose. Scholars must take these two types of evidence, primary and secondary, which only occasionally complement each other, and analyze them both in their specific contexts in any investigation of how the Etruscans used jewelry.

3. The Bulla: A Case Study for Life-Stage Use

A familiar Etrusco-Latial ornament, the bulla, serves as a useful example with which to explore changing jewelry use over the life course. Life began with jewelry. Parents sought to protect their infants from illness or bodily harm by covering them with magical amulets; a string of circular bulla pendants worn across the chest is a common sight in representations of children. The practice was widespread throughout the Mediterranean and continued well beyond the ancient period; Italian Renaissance artists, for example, painted the infant Jesus wearing coral amulets to help ward off evil (Dasen 2003; Musacchio 1999: 131–133). Roman authors credit the Etruscans with using gold bullae and they adopted the ornament for their elite male children (Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 3.4; Juvenal *Satires* 5.163; Plutarch *Life of Sertorius* 14.3). Not all bullae, however, are gold. Amber, bronze, and lead examples are represented in the archaeological record of Etruria from the eighth century on, found in children's tombs or in sanctuaries. Late sources refer to leather bulla pendants, and it is possible to imagine that cloth, clay, or carved wood – essentially any material that could create a hollow, lentoid pendant – could have been used. A cavity of some sort would have been necessary to incorporate some potion or other substance. Traces of labdanum, a pitch-like substance, for example, have been found in bullae now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (De Puma 2013: 259, no. 7.15) and the Walters Art Museum (Walters Art Gallery 1980: 67 no. 209). Perfume was also inserted into the hollow spheres of horseshoe earrings in the Vatican, suggesting that the Etruscans may have thought of jewelry as a scent container (Scarpignato 1981: 14).

While the material used to make the ornament *could* indicate the family's economic or social status, the chief goal of this jewelry was to protect the young wearer from harm. Special rituals, incantations, and blessings were

undoubtedly spoken over the piece before the family set it on their child's body. A bulla was therefore simply the physical manifestation – a relic – of a powerful ritual ceremony. Its presence on a child would signal to other community members that the family had undertaken the proper protection and integrated their child into Etruscan social practices and supernatural beliefs.

Representations of bullae generally show male babies, and a few females, with a single neck bulla, along with wrist and ankle bands. The visual emphasis on boys likely has more to do with their role in the particular scene (e.g., Eros figures, the baby Heracle, etc.) rather than indicating that they were a device intended solely for baby boys. The distinguishing feature of childhood bullae in Etruria was that youngsters wore a single pendant around the neck (e.g., the bronze votive recovered from near Lake Trasimene, now in the Vatican, and the swaddled babies from Veii; Haynes 2000: figs. 284–85) or, less often, a long strap of amulets across the body (e.g., the child represented in the exergue of a fourth-century mirror now in the British Museum (de Grummond 2006: fig. 7.15)), a style that is also typical of Athenian and Cypriot infant depictions (Dasen 2003: 278–283, figs. 1 and 5). It is impossible to know how long an Etruscan child wore his or her amulet. In Greece, the amulets were connected with the earliest life stage, infancy to about three years old, and then they disappear from the visual repertoire (Beaumont 2013: 24–42). Perhaps Etruscan boys or girls dedicated their bulla to thank the gods for their safety, passed it on to a younger generation, or re-used it in a new charm for a later life stage.

Adult men and women also wore bullae – often in groups of three – as armbands, necklaces, or both. Some surviving examples have decorative scenes in relief, like those in the tomb group from Vulci, now in the Vatican (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: fig. 260), while others are plain; the popular combination of three pendants could have had some significance that is now lost. When decorated, the bullae normally show a trio of gods and goddesses, again alluding to a numerological meaning.

The ornaments belong to the dress of mythical and heroic figures as well as mortals. The bulla seems to have carried no inherent gender markers. Since bullae were obviously laden with magical potential, as demonstrated by their use for child protection, certain spells and materials used in the preparation of the pendant could have appealed to different wearers. Love charms to attract and keep mates, talismans to protect hunters and warriors on their campaigns, or the promise of good health or fertility all could have spurred individuals to wear a bulla amulet.

In addition, bulla pendants embellished with religious iconography could very well have been part of a costume adopted by a priest/priestess or other ritual participant. I have suggested elsewhere that a certain set of jewelry prevalent in the fourth century marked female ritual dress in Etruria and Latium (Castor 2010). Priestesses or ritual actors may have adopted the distinctive high

crowns, horseshoe earrings, and bulla necklaces found as tomb sets and in terracotta sculpture during their service. For example, an early fourth-century sarcophagus from Caere, now in the Museo Etrusco Gregoriano at the Vatican, shows a bearded male prone on a funeral couch; he wears a necklace with bullae and amphora-shaped pendants, and a band with the same arrangement of pendants on his left arm (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: pl. VIII). The flat leaf wreath on his head and the floral garland over his chest further elaborate his costume. Scholars interpret him as an official or magistrate because of his costume and the other scenes on the sarcophagus. Here, the bullae on his neck and arm may have served as emblems of office.

Not all figures wearing bullae convey high status or position. A nude youth wearing a gold armband with bullae is painted in the Tomb of Orcus II; he stands next to a cabinet filled with metal vessels (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: pl. XVIII). Both his position and nudity suggest that he is a servant or slave, albeit one adorned with gold. The funerary banquet scene includes mythical figures and therefore takes us out of the realm of the ordinary, but the use of the armband adds a distinctive element to this figure. Given the flexibility in the function of bullae – pendants that represented magical powers, included divine imagery and may have signaled civic and religious office – they could serve children, men, and women. A strap of ten bronze bullae discovered fastened to the skull of a horse buried in the Podere San Cerberone at Populonia (Warden 1983: 70), moreover, indicates that even animals wore bullae in Etruria, presumably so that they, too, would receive protection from disease and injury.

With such wide use, bullae must have been ubiquitous components of Etruscan dress. Parents could teach their infants and toddlers that the charm ward off malign influences and thus begin to indoctrinate them into their cultural beliefs. Adults worried and prayed for their own health and that of their family, and had other concerns as well: luck or prosperity, religious devotion, or perhaps achievement of a certain role in the community that merited the wearing of a bulla ornament. Those who sported bulla jewelry would have described how this ornament fit into their personal and family history. As their needs changed, men or women could alter their accessories. Pieces chosen for particular moments – pregnancy and childbirth, a military campaign, a new economic venture, religious office, the aches of old age – would become part of the wearer's identity for that life-stage. While much of the critical evidence for life-stage dress is ephemeral and would have been specific to individuals, attention to who wore a bulla and at what time in their life they are represented helps to move us beyond the bland and facile generalizations concerning wealth and prestige that jewelry typically prompts.

4. Beyond the Bulla: Children's Jewelry

After the first stage of infancy, children rarely appear in the artistic record. In Greek art, mainly on painted vases and votive or funerary stelae, boys and girls are shown acting in important roles at funerals, weddings, and in religious festivals, where they function as generational links between the past and future (Beaumont 2013). In Etruria, it is the young girls who appear in tomb paintings as attendants at adult banquets who sometimes wear gold jewelry. For example, in the fourth century Tomb of the Shields at Tarquinia (Steingraber 1985: no. 109), a blonde girl with short hair attends the feast of Larth Velcha and his wife. She wears a gold earring, a simpler variant of the horseshoe earrings that Velia Seitithi wears, and a gold bead necklace that fits closely around her neck. She holds a fan at the ready to ensure the couple's comfort. Like the nude servant with the bulla armband in the Tomb of Orcus II, her dress represents the status of the family she serves, rather than her own.

Votive terracotta figures in fifth- and fourth-century sanctuary deposits also may depict girls, who are distinguished from women by their short hair. At Lavinium, an Italic site discussed in more detail below, some of the females wear earrings and necklaces (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: pl. XIV). The types shown do not always have parallels in real jewelry and some may be artistic creations; others, however, represent typical Greek forms, such as the spear-point necklaces popular in the Hellenistic period. The representations of the girls rarely show them wearing native ornament forms like horseshoe earrings and bulla necklaces. While this may be a hint that those accessories belonged to a different age or status, the fact that many different ethnic groups worshipped at the site make understanding such choices far from clear. Further close study of this group of evidence may help to sort out the combination of costume elements and age.

5. Adult Women

Adult women are shown wearing jewelry more often than men or children in Etruscan art. All media – painting, pottery, sculpture, engraved mirrors, and even jewelry itself – illustrate adorned women. The banquet couple in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing (see [Figure 19.1](#)), for example, depicts the female wearing multiple ornaments: earrings, a choker necklace, and three bracelets on one arm. The triad of bracelets is especially notable, since bracelets were usually worn one on each wrist. Both the high quantity of ornaments and the large size of some of them, such as the disk earring, are notable features of jewelry in Etruscan art.

Most females in Archaic and Classical Etruscan art could be anywhere in age from 15 to 50. More nuanced age-stages were obviously not essential for the Etruscans in their art. Brides or married women with their husbands appear prominently, especially in the funerary art that comprises so much of our evidence. Motherhood is indicated by the presence of children with females, but many other possible familial roles cannot be identified. Where are the sisters, aunts, widows, grandmothers, stepmothers, and mothers-of-the bride (or groom)? Evidence for social roles, like professional identity, is also lacking from the surviving art. Religious roles take a prominent place, likely because the votive evidence retrieved from sanctuaries shows females in a ritual setting. But expertise in other aspects of life such as medicine and healing, cooking, craft specialization, music, and dance, among others, do not merit artistic focus. Finally, mature and elderly women are rarely portrayed until the Hellenistic period, when they show up, still only occasionally, on sarcophagi and funerary cippi (see further, [Chapter 22](#)).

Much of the artistic interest in women wearing jewelry is concentrated on brides. Marriage ceremonies would be an important occasion that highlighted personal ornaments and clothing. Gifts of jewelry for the bride were common in many ancient and historical cultures. Some could have been heirlooms or newly made pieces reconfigured from inherited ornaments. Thus, they would contain familial history as the bride joined her husband's family. Other jewelry could have been a gift from the groom or his relatives as a sign that the new wife was incorporated into the family. Torelli (1984: 31–50), moreover, has argued that some of the richly adorned female terracotta figures from Lavinium represented brides, in large part because their jewelry was such a significant part of their costume. Fourth-century engraved mirrors supply many scenes of bridal preparation, where lavishly dressed females are perfumed or adorned as part of the ceremonial process. Mythical figures such as Thetis and Alcestis, along with a woman inscribed Malavisch, often serve as model brides (Wiman 1992; de Grummond 2006: 159–160). Men are not normally part of the scene, although the purpose of adornment, to attract a mate, pervades the imagery. Given the many connotations associated with jewelry – love and fertility charm, heirloom, perfume container – it is easy to understand the potency of these images to the individual using the mirror.

The adorned woman, usually wearing a set of jewelry consisting of earrings, a necklace, and a pair of bracelets or bulla armlets, often appears in concert with her husband. To the list of images of couples at the banquet discussed above (e.g., in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing (see [Figures 17.2, 19.1](#)) and the Tomb of the Shields) can be added the image of Velia in the Tomb of Orcus I (Steingraber 1985: no. 93), who also wears multiple pieces of gold jewelry. Just as the image of the couple seems to have signified the strength and longevity of the family line in these settings (Bonfante 2013), a woman's jewelry points to her ability to live in luxury and ease.

Two well-known, Late Classical carved sarcophagi from Vulci, now in Boston, also include bejeweled married couples on their lids (see further, Rowland 2008: figs. 1–2). Ramtha Vishnai, for example, wears a round disk earring, an old-fashioned style at this point in the late fourth or even early third century, while her daughter-in-law, Thanchvil Tarnai, sports a more up-to-date disk with inverted pyramid pendant earring. Additionally, Ramtha’s son, Larth Tetnies, wears a spiral bracelet. Representations of jewelry become even more elaborate in the Hellenistic period, as exemplified by the colorful terracotta sarcophagus of a Chiusine woman now in Florence ([Figure 19.2](#), Plate Section). As she reclines on a mattress and pillow, Larthia Seianti shows off a pair of inverted pyramid earrings that hang from a small disk, a spear-point necklace, a pendant hanging from a chain, a gold bracelet, and a crown. A braided gold belt knotted in a square (or “Herakles”) knot, a form usually associated with brides (see further, De Puma 2013: 212), is wrapped around her waist. Larthia’s jewelry represents types common in the Hellenistic Mediterranean and points to a more cosmopolitan aesthetic popular in the late Etruscan period.



Figure 19.2 Sarcophagus of Larthia Seianti, detail of upper body and head, c.180–170 BCE. Painted terracotta. From the Tomb of the Larcna Family, La Martinella, near Chiusi. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Another important setting in which adorned women played a public role was in the religious sphere. The dedication of female votive figures could represent either a goddess herself or her female worshippers, and it can be difficult to determine the difference. But no matter who the figures are, their jewelry takes on an especially prominent role in many of these representations. Fourth- and third-century votive female busts, for example,

emphasize their adornment through elaborate crowns, earrings, and necklaces. The fidelity of this jewelry to the originals, moreover, appears to have been exact: Andr n (1955–56), in particular, has argued that molds taken from actual ornaments were used by the coroplasts. The significance of the jewelry may vary, sometimes indicating a recently married bride, or denoting a specific festival or ritual dress, but it was of utmost importance to get the jewelry right. Some of the images also celebrated regional Etrusco-Italic jewelry types rather than international Mediterranean styles of jewelry as had occurred in the Archaic period and would happen again in the third century. A woman would presumably play many roles in personal and civic religious festivals, each requiring some form of special dress. Adornment, whether in the form of metal jewelry, floral garlands and wreaths, specially braided or knotted bands, or some other accessory, would help to prepare a woman for her activity and announce to viewers that she belonged in this setting.

Women in the later stages of life, who are most often depicted in the funerary art of the Hellenistic period, regularly wore multiple pieces of jewelry. This may represent jewelry a woman accrued during her life or result from the more elaborate dress style common at this time. Women alone or with their husbands wear crowns, necklaces or torques, breast bands that cross their chest, bracelets, and rings (Bonfante 2000: fig. 92). Closer study of the costume, jewelry, and age represented could reveal some patterns about the types of jewelry that older women adopted at this time. Once again, the Etruscans looked outside of their traditional stock of ornaments to incorporate Greek and European forms of jewelry (Castor 2010: 37–40). International styles were again in favor, perhaps as Etruscans explored new opportunities or political alliances that may have included marriage to foreigners, in the face of the expanding Roman presence.

Since the artistic contexts in which Etruscan women appear are largely circumscribed to reinforcing either their marital state or their religious duties, it is not surprising that these are the social identities for which scholars can reconstruct the use of jewelry. As seen above, however, even within these stereotypical categories of female representation it is possible to tease out more specific meanings. In some settings, local jewelry types are highlighted, while others call for Greek styles. Foreign manufacture of an artifact, such as a sarcophagus, could also determine some aspects of dress. Scholars must consider these distinctions together with the genre and style prevalent at the time, but scrutiny to details of dress can and will continue to yield new insights into women’s public roles.

6. Male Etruscan Jewelry

The concept of male jewelry has already been introduced in in the discussion

of the bulla above. Etruscan men, like their wives, mothers, and daughters, sport a wider range of ornaments than is present in most ancient Mediterranean art, although it is never a regular part of their costume. Clothing fasteners such as pins, fibulae, and belts served a functional purpose, but their representation suggests that the costume itself was significant to the meaning of the image. Some clothing points to an official capacity, such as the bronze figurine of a *haruspex* in the Vatican, outfitted in a long mantle fastened at the chest with an arched fibula; his pointed hat helps to identify his position (Bonfante 2000: fig. 138). Thus, the clothing and its ornaments together give clues to the wearer's identity.

Men also wore body jewelry. The 2013 discovery of an intact Etruscan tomb at Tarquinia was initially identified as belonging to a "warrior" equipped with a spear, and his wife, who wore jewelry. Subsequent notices revealed that, in fact, it was a male who was wearing jewelry and a female with the spear (Pinna 2013; see also the discussion in [Chapter 13](#)). This discovery joins a few other examples of males buried with jewelry, such as the earrings found with males in other Tarquinian tombs (Cavagnaro Vanoni 1972, 1977). As with women, normal male costume likely included jewelry much more regularly than the images suggest. An abundance of Etruscan finger rings, for example, survive today in museum collections, often without secure provenance (see further, Hansson 2013). Some examples could belong to men or women; size offers a possible way to assign some rings to a gender, but even that does not guarantee the sex of the wearer, since a man might put a small ring on a necklace or a woman could wear larger ring in the same way. Few images of men wearing rings exist until the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods when, like their female counterparts, males, too, were embellished with a variety of accessories. Other jewelry types fare better in the visual evidence, particularly the bulla necklace or armband described above. The elegant spiral twisted bracelet that Larth Tetnies wears on the Boston sarcophagus has already been noted above. Because artists depicted men wearing jewelry only occasionally, it is difficult to extract generalizations from this scattered evidence.

Nevertheless, given the elite Etruscans' interest in luxury goods, it is possible to surmise that males might well have adopted personal ornaments more readily than the surviving evidence suggests. Eastern males, particularly in the Persian heartland, but also in the far western territories of Lydia and Asia Minor, incorporated bracelets, neck pendants, and earrings into their dress, as we see the Persian guards wear at the royal palace of Susa, now in the Louvre, for example. Many of the jewelry types that men in Asia Minor, Persia, and even Egypt, were depicted wearing likely belong to a set of ornaments distributed by the king as a reward for military or civil service (Castor forthcoming). Thus, their presence in the public and private art of these cultures speaks directly to political prestige rather than personal wealth and

luxury. Etruscan connections with Asia Minor may have influenced or reinforced the use of jewelry by males in Italy.

Study of jewelry use according to life stage helps to enhance understandings of its meanings. In addition to adornment, ornaments can serve as relics of magical rites, depict an age-stage, and point to religious participation or marital status, among other possible functions. Not just inherently precious, rings, necklaces, and other accessories had added symbolic value from the materials used to craft them.

7. The Materials of Jewelry

Archaeologists have long recognized that imported materials can enhance the prestige of a finished product because of their exotic and unfamiliar origin. A recent focus on materiality in the humanities and social sciences has reinvigorated this avenue of research. When we think of jewelry, we first imagine gold objects. Gold, a noble metal, does not degrade, and so we see the artifact today as its last wearer did millennia ago. Apart from physical damage such as tears or dents inflicted by a collapsed burial chamber, gold does not rust, tarnish, or dull over the years. This invulnerability makes gold almost universally admired and used particularly for symbolically valuable goods that require a long existence: religious artifacts, insignia of power, heirlooms, or gifts to accompany the dead into the afterlife. While gold is impermeable to environment and time, owners can readily convert pieces by melting it down to create new objects or use as bullion. Such a combination of permanence and convertibility enhances the value of the metal. Silver, on the other hand, is more vulnerable than gold to its physical surroundings. It tarnishes without regular polishing and can become brittle and corrode depending on the soil chemistry. Relatively little silver Etruscan jewelry is known in comparison to gold pieces, although it may well have had a greater currency than the archaeological record suggests, especially given the region's proximity to silver sources in Spain. Bronze and other base metals like lead or iron also corrode more heavily, although the basic elements of bracelets, rings, or clothing ornaments like belts and pins remain largely intact.

Faya Causey's (2011) publication of carved ambers in the J. Paul Getty Museum returns our attention to the layered associations conveyed by a material and its imagery; these two aspects of the ornament, she argues convincingly, cannot be separated in a discussion if scholars hope to grasp its meaning for ancient users. Many Greek and Roman authors fascinated by fossilized resin explored its mythical origin and associations, its efficacy in healing, and its use in transitions to the afterlife. Next to gold, amber is the material that is likened most often to the sun by poets, naturalists, and philosophers. Indeed, when ancient authors sought to explain amber's origin,

they most often turned to the sun; among the stories associated with this material are that it came from the tears of the Heliades, who wept when Zeus killed their brother Phaethon during his reckless driving of the sun chariot (Causey 2011: 52–61). Thus, amber is closely associated with tears and mourning. The inclusions of insects and other organic materials captured as the resin fossilized offers compellingly visible and permanent memorials of life present in this material as in no other. In addition to the importance of its color, amber also is one of the few jewelry materials to emit an odor (a pleasant pine scent) when rubbed against wool; when burned, Pliny wrote that its scent was “more agreeable even than frankincense” (Causey 2011: 68). Its buoyancy in water also adds to its unique qualities. When Etruscan artisans carved amber to wear around their customer’s necks, arms or waist, they augmented the significance of the material further still.

Amber and semi-precious stones could be incorporated into metal settings or carved and worn on their own. Etruscans made much use of amber for personal ornaments, carving it into pendants or hewing it roughly in chunks to wear around the neck or waist. The luminous, shining quality of amber that likely attracted ancient wearers degrades significantly when the object is buried. Most pieces darken and, depending on the conditions in which they are deposited, may oxidize. More damage can occur in the form of chipping and flaking, which further erodes the surface; few pieces of amber can retain their original appearance unless placed in watery or oxygen-free contexts.

The Etruscans enjoyed colorful combinations in their jewelry, mixing colored stone and metal. A sixth-century necklace from Vulci, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example, shows multicolored agate and carnelian pendants in gold settings (De Puma 2013: 253 no. 7.1, fig. 7.1). Semi-precious stones (agate, jasper, carnelian) retain their original appearance as well. Carnelian especially proved to be useful for signet ring inlays because the hardness of the stone stood up well to the inevitable wear and tear of finger ornaments. Striped agate was also popular in finger rings and pendants. Both the colors and the stones used for jewelry likely had symbolic associations that have since been lost, but which would have added significance for the wearer.

In addition to these materials well-represented in museums, the Etruscans must have used a wide range of goods beyond what has survived for their dress and adornment (e.g. see [Chapter 16](#) on textiles). Class and economic status would not prevent men, women and children from accessorizing themselves with floral garlands, lucky shells and stones, brightly woven strips of cloth, grass, grains, or other materials at hand. Many of these ornaments could have had the same purpose as costlier metal and stone objects – that is, to indicate various social affiliations, marital status, amuletic powers, festival dress, etc. – but they simply do not survive in the archaeological record.

A small class of necklace pendants made from animal teeth or stone replicas

offers an example of found objects converted into personal ornaments. One of the necklace pendants in the Poggio Colla jewelry cache (see Castor 2009), for example, included a dog's tooth set in a decorative gold cap, while the fossilized great white shark's tooth discovered at the site in 2011 – most-likely once part of a pendant – has comparanda at both Etruscan and prehistoric sites in Italy (Trentacoste 2013: 85, 96–97). Parallels of the type also exist in the form of a bear's tooth pendant now in Berlin, four tooth pendants at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a basalt pendant carved in the shape of a tooth now housed in the British Museum (De Puma 2013: 260 no. 7.16, figs. 7.16 a–d, with references to additional examples). Signs of rubbing on the gold cap of the basalt pendant now in London indicate that the piece had been in circulation before it was deposited and may well have had more than one owner who touched the pendant for luck or out of habit.

The use of an animal tooth as body ornament creates a powerful connection between humans and the natural world (see further, Chierici 1999). A bear tooth would undoubtedly give rise to stories about how a mighty hunter had killed the creature, even if he really had found it after the animal died: the wearer could be the hunter himself or perhaps a grandchild who inherited the piece, with all of its attendant family and perhaps mythical lore attached to the heirloom. The literal defanging of an animal, at some level a blood ritual, transferred its power to the wearer (cf. Warden 2009). If the wearer was a female, this animal potency could be applied to female dress. Such imagery likely underlined the woman's position in an elite family, or perhaps indicated some skill that she had mastered, although the circumstances in which she would don the jewelry are unfortunately lost to us.

In general, scholarship on the Etruscans has been sensitive to the importance of the materials used to manufacture art. For jewelry, the types of metal, stone, and other material used to decorate the body become a key component of its value.

8. How Did They Do That?

One of the first questions that museum-goers ask when they see masterpieces of Etruscan jewelry is: how did they make such intricate pieces? Their wonder is reasonable, since scholars rightly list the craft of the Etruscan goldsmith among the technological achievements of their society. While every Mediterranean and Near Eastern culture made finely executed jewelry, the accessories of the Etruscans stand apart for their technical virtuosity and craftsmanship (see further, [Chapter 24](#)). Just as remarkable is the fact that ancient goldsmiths required relatively few tools to execute these objects and no magnification devices have been identified. Primary evidence, apart from the finished product, rarely survives, but experimental archaeology has helped

to explain several aspects of ancient practice.

Jewelry makers normally constructed gold jewelry from multiple component parts. A main motivation for this was to save unnecessary expense on precious materials by avoiding casting pieces solid. For example, the Late Classical horseshoe earring type could vary in size from 3 cm up to 14 cm; a solid piece of gold jewelry at the upper end of this range would be unmanageable to wear in addition to being far more costly than the hollow version. Goldsmiths worked with sheet gold, hammering out the metal thinly so that they could then shape it into molds, over formers with designs in repoussè, or otherwise manipulate the sheet to create an ornament. Beads and pendants are typically made of two halves. Some of the substances set into bullae have already been discussed, so the use of jewelry as a container is a familiar concept, but sometimes craftsmen inserted a material or some other type of core to stabilize the ornament. Finger rings require heavier and more substantial construction and were hammered to size from solid metal. Artisans engraved or chased designs onto metal bezels or attached shaped stones, such as the scarabs, which were popular in the sixth century, or signets with engraved intaglio figures, into the gold ring (see further, Hansson 2013).

Once goldsmiths had cut out and shaped the pieces of an ornament, they could then use a variety of decorative techniques to embellish the surface. It is at this stage that the exceptional skill found on Etruscan jewelry comes to the fore. Granulation, the use of tiny spheres to create patterns and designs, is the hallmark of seventh- and sixth-century pieces. Some examples contain granulation of such small size that it is called “powder granulation” because it resembles a fine mist or powder on the surface. Most modern goldsmiths agree that the real skill in granulation technique comes not in the manufacture of the tiny grains or spheres, but in their application and attachment to the sheet backing without fusing or losing the shape of the grains. The grains were made by cutting small squares or wire, placing them in a crucible filled with carbon or charcoal which separated the pieces of gold, and heating it until the gold pieces rolled into small spheres. This process created grains of different sizes that the goldsmith would then sort and arrange in a decorative pattern. Setting the grains and keeping them in place was a significant challenge; scholars have proposed different fixatives, ranging from saliva to resins, to set and keep the grains in place until the piece was finished (Gaultier 2013: 915–916). Etruscan goldsmiths achieved the advanced technique of fixing the granules by heat alone and by using a colloidal mixture of copper salts between the grains and the surface. Fusing, using heat alone to attach the grains, was a difficult process because it required the craftsman to monitor the heat closely to make sure that the grains did not melt into a sheet of gold. Various modern experiments also suggest that the ancient goldsmith used different types of colloidal fluxes, including copper, as a solder that would melt into both the grains and the gold sheet, creating a metal bond between

them (Formigli 1995: 68–72).

Etruscan granulated jewelry is distinctive in its style as well as in its advanced technique. Geometric patterns were popular, such as the fine meander on the gold hoops from the Regolini-Galassi tomb (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: fig. 36). Figural designs in silhouette are used on some of the masterpieces of seventh-century jewelry: a pin from Vetulonia, now in Florence, for example, shows griffins and other hybrid creatures in silhouette granulation (Cristofani and Martelli 2000: fig. 58). Customers could also choose from a variety of techniques used for jewelry, as is demonstrated by a pair of fibulae in Florence which replicates granulated designs by using sheet gold pressed or dapped into a mold decorated with an animal frieze (Figure 19.3). Although nothing is known about the cost of jewelry in the Etruscan world, presumably pieces that required less expertise would also be cheaper, but still allow the wearer to embellish themselves with stylish ornaments.



Figure 19.3 Leech-shaped fibulae with stamped decoration (animal friezes), c.630 BCE. Gold. From the Tomb of the Lictor, Vetulonia. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

A second important decorative technique involved the use of filigree wire. The wires were made from rolled strips of gold, and artisans could create a variety of decorative effects using them: plain, spiral twisted wires were used for herringbone-pattern borders, while beaded and spiral twist wires were

thicker and added visual interest to the surface. Etruscan *a baule* earrings, a native type well-represented in museum collections, show intricate patterns using filigree wire and granulation to create densely embellished hoops. Tiny animals or floral ornaments are often embedded in these ornaments as well, creating rich, complex surfaces unparalleled at the time.

The goldsmiths who produced Etruscan jewelry were masters of their craft. Unfortunately, very little information exists about these individuals. Eastern craftspeople are generally believed to have traveled to Etruria at certain times: during unrest in the East in the eighth and sixth centuries, for example (Gaultier 2013: 915–919). It is not known if they were primarily male or if females also engaged in jewelry production in Etruria. Certainly there is no physical necessity – apart from the myopia of the goldsmiths – that decides the craft in favor of men or women. Women’s smaller hands may have been useful and, for that matter, children could also have played a role in this craft. A jewelry maker did not need a permanent shop and could easily have traveled, or the finished products could have had a wide dispersal beyond the place of manufacture. Some scholars have suggested that the jewelers who made the finest work of the Orientalizing period emigrated from other regions such as Phoenicia, where granulation techniques may have been practiced at advanced levels (Camporeale 2013: 889–891; Gaultier 2013: 915). Whether native or emigrant, goldsmiths certainly became aware that Etruscans were discerning clients who appreciated complex techniques and exquisite finished products.

9. The Afterlife of Etruscan Jewelry

To a significant degree, the study of Etruscan jewelry requires scholars to sort out the authentic objects from the many replicas, pastiches, and forgeries that circulated in the late nineteenth century. One reason for this mixed bag of Etruscan and Etruscan-style jewelry is that the era of early Etruscan excavation coincided with, and indeed, stimulated, a surge of interest in “Archaeological Style” jewelry that replicated ornaments from ancient European cultures. For several decades in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Castellanis, leaders in this type of jewelry, presented newly discovered ancient jewelry side-by-side with their replicas in their workshops. Exhibits at the Louvre in 2004 and at the Bard Graduate Center in 2005 investigated Italian Archaeological Style jewelry in its cultural context; a 2010 show at the British Museum studied Victorian jewelry more broadly, including Archaeological Style ornaments (see Gaultier and Metzger 2005; Weber Soros and Walker 2004; Gere and Rudoe 2010).

This attention to the afterlife of ancient jewelry has had several benefits. First, re-examination and technical analysis of artifacts has revealed forgeries and

misattributions of objects that have crept into the scholarly literature (e.g., see Turfa 2009). Second, more recent discoveries in goldsmithing techniques have allowed a reconsideration of Alessandro Castellani's investigations into Etruscan granulation and filigree. His own interest was stimulated when he was 13 and studied the Regolini-Galassi jewelry with his father, Fortunato Castellani, also a goldsmith. The adult Alessandro played a leading role in promoting the revival of ancient and medieval styles. Indeed, he launched an ambitious project to illustrate the whole history of Italy – freshly unified – through its jewelry at the 1862 Grand Exhibition in London. These pieces included ornaments inspired by Villanovan and other Italic jewelry, Etruscan-era necklaces, earrings, and brooches, styles from Magna Graecia and Roman jewelry. The exhibit continued its chronological march with a substantial collection of medieval-inspired works, including micro-mosaic pendants and brooches. These charming ornaments used a technique that was created in the eighteenth century but gained historicity from the use of ancient and medieval mosaic imagery or Greek and Latin inscriptions. Castellani's dedication to exploring both the techniques and the forms of ancient goldsmiths helped to promote the notion of the "mysterious" Etruscan craftsmen using skills and knowledge lost to the modern day. This had the effect of raising Castellani's own profile and prestige and increasing demand for his products. As a leader in Archaeological Style jewelry, Castellani attracted elite visitors from all over the world who traveled to Rome or his other workshop in Paris. European royalty, famous authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, artists such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Fred Leighton (who drew heavily on ancient themes in their work), and politicians and wealthy entrepreneurs all signed the guest book at the Castellani shops. Other goldsmiths in Italy and beyond followed Castellani's example and in the late nineteenth century, Archaeological Style jewelry was widely available in Europe and America (Weber Soros and Walker 2004; Gere and Rudoe 2010).

The renewed interest in the reception of archaeological jewelry can also stimulate study of how Victorians incorporated it and other artifacts into their own process of self-identification. Just as jewelry and gender identity were issues for the Etruscans, the same concerns applied to the Victorians. It was in this period that males rejected most personal ornaments from their dress. A watch, fob, and cufflinks became the only jewelry types that men used regularly. It is perhaps no coincidence that ancient jewelry began to be relegated to the minor arts in the scholarly literature at this juncture. Moreover, nineteenth-century mechanization played a role in women's ornaments and dress just as it did in other industries. Now that fine jewelry (or its simulacrum) was available to the lower and middle classes, we can trace a vein of social anxiety about the deceptiveness of appearance. Archaeological jewelry, which could range from the Castellani brothers' exacting replicas to actual artifacts blended into Victorian ornaments, offered the highly desirable commodity of originality to its wearer, but the cheaper versions also gave

middle class women a veneer of education and historical awareness. Authors such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot used jewelry as a vehicle to fashion certain identifiable character types: in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855–57), for example, Mrs. Merdle is described simply as “The Bosom,” from which her swindler husband hung diamonds and other accessories to announce his wealth (Arnold 2011). Further investigation of who bought Etruscan-style jewelry and how they incorporated it into their dress during the nineteenth century could illuminate the post-antique journey of Etruscan ornaments in public and private collections.

10. Conclusions

The perspectives surveyed in this chapter share a general approach of rigorous examination of an object within many cultural layers. This method has special resonance for ancient jewelry, accessories created from intrinsically and symbolically valuable materials and intended to be worn on the body. Precious metal jewelry owned and deposited by elite Etruscans survives most often, but it is possible to imagine that anyone could have converted a stone or shell into bodily decoration in antiquity. Ornaments could then have offered supernatural protection or denoted a new stage in life. These meanings would have blended together with others (e.g., ethnic affiliation) to create dense and multiple markers of identity for the Etruscans.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Higgins 1980 offers a fundamental introduction to the types of jewelry used in Greece, Etruria and Rome. Cristofani and Martelli 2000 provides an excellent catalog and survey of Etruscan jewelry types and its representation in Etruscan art. Bonfante 2003 is an essential introduction to Etruscan costume in general, with some discussion of jewelry. Causey (2011) offers a detailed investigation of amber and its cultural significance in the ancient world (see accompanying website for photographs and descriptions of the carved amber pendants in the J. Paul Getty collection). Gaultier 2013 surveys the types of Etruscan jewelry chronologically and discusses the import of eastern techniques and artists. Turfa 2009 explores the history of the Etruscan jewelry in the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania, while De Puma 2013 offers a full catalog of the jewelry at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of its Etruscan collection.

CHAPTER 20

Luxuria prolapsa est

Etruscan Wealth and Decadence

Hilary Becker

1. Introduction

Pliny the Elder wrote that the tomb of Lars Porsenna was an insane folly (*vesana dementia*) and that the expense entailed in building it exhausted the resources of the kingdom of Chiusi (*Natural History* 36.19.93). While his description is moralizing and part of a larger value judgment about extravagant tombs around the Mediterranean, Pliny's characterization of Porsenna's tomb is in line with other treatments of the wealth of the Etruscans in both Greek and Roman sources. This story incorporates two of the ethnographic *topoi* that are frequently associated with the Etruscans on the part of Greek and Roman authors. The first is the extreme wealth of the Etruscans. The second *topos* is an ethnographic stereotype, which is that the Etruscans' wealth contributed to opulent spending, as was abundantly demonstrated by Porsenna's tomb, and even to a largely degenerate lifestyle (see further, [Chapter 22](#)). This chapter reviews the evidence for both of these *topoi* in the ancient sources, with the aim of understanding better these Etruscan stereotypes and the extent to which they reflected Etruscan cultural realities, or Greek and Roman fears and misunderstandings of the Etruscan "other."

2. Etruscan Wealth

Etruria, a wealthy land (χώρα εὐδαίμων), was known for its rich fields (*opulenta Etruriae arva*) (Strabo *Geography* 5.2.2; Livy 9.36.11). Both Varro and Pliny note that certain areas were able to produce grain at a higher yield than elsewhere, while the fields of Veii were considered to be more fertile (*uberior*) than those of nearby Rome (Varro *On Agriculture* 1.44.1; Pliny *Natural History* 18.20.87; Livy 5.24.5). Varro considers Etruscan soil to be emblematic of what the best soil could be like: "in rich soil, as in Etruria, it is allowed to see productive and perennially cultivated grain fields and abundant trees, and all of it without moss" (*On Agriculture* 1.9.5–6). Similarly, Dionysius of Halicarnassus recorded that Etruscan vines could be worked

with the least amount of labor (*Roman Antiquities* 1.37.2). Indeed, all of the natural environs of Etruria were seen by many Greek and Roman writers to be similarly fertile and even over-productive. Polybius (12.4.8) stated that one Etruscan swine could produce 1,000 offspring in a lifetime, a sentiment Strabo (*Geography* 5.2.9) shared in his claim that even the “large and many” Etruscan lakes teemed with fish and birds.

While every area of Etruria was fertile, northern Etruria received particular attention for its fecundity. Livy, for example, wrote, “the fertile region was among the first regions of Italy, the Etruscan fields, which lie between Faesulae and Arretium, are rich with an abundance of grain, sheep, and of all things” (23.3.3). The fertility of northern Etruria is so noticeable that it even enticed the Gauls to attempt to occupy Etruscan territory in the early fourth century BCE, since they reputedly claimed that the Etruscans could not cultivate all of the land and that they should share it.¹ Whether this account is accurate or not, it reveals a perception of the Etruscans as having a great wealth of land, far more than they could tend.

Various ancient authors praise the wealth and resources of Etruria and its individual cities: Plutarch, for example, writes that Etruscan cities are “fully equipped both for productive business and a sumptuous lifestyle” (*Life of Camillus* 16).² The wealth of these cities individually, and collectively, is perhaps best exemplified by Livy’s account of Scipio Africanus Elder in 205 BCE, when he sought supplies for his campaign against the Carthaginians during the Second Punic War (Livy 28.45). Each city promised resources that it could best supply, with materials ranging from grain to wood for shipbuilding, and linen. The offered stores even included the unworked ores and worked metal of Populonia and Arezzo.

Thus, to these ancient authors, the Etruscan lands not only offered fertile land for farming and animal husbandry but also abundant metal resources. In fact, almost all of the metals that were in use in the ancient world could be found in Etruria (Craddock 1984: 212). This wealth of metals, which was recognized early on, brought foreigners to Etruria in order to purvey the metal and mineral resources along the Tyrrhenian coast (Becker Forthcoming, 2016a). The metals of Etruria, and in particular those found on the island of Elba, enjoyed a special repute. Not only did Pliny (*Natural History* 37.77; 34.41) write that no country produced more gold, copper, or iron than Italy, but also that the island of Elba was still producing iron in the first century CE. Indeed, the iron at Elba was so abundant (Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.13) that it was thought to be inexhaustible (Virgil *Aeneid* 10.174; Servius 10.174). An anonymous Roman author also describes how the copper mined at Elba came to be exhausted and then, after a time, how iron again appeared in the mine (*De mirabilibus auscultationibus* 92).³ Strabo (*Geography* 5.2.6) also observed that the miraculous mines at Elba were filled up again after they had been mined.

The nearly magical properties of the mines at Elba helped explain to foreigners one of the reasons for the prosperity of at least some Etruscans. The wealth of the Elban mines was one of the factors that contributed to the monumental elite tombs filled with rich funerary assemblages built during the seventh to fourth centuries BCE in the necropoleis of S. Cerbone and Porcareccia of Populonia (Minto 1954: 307; Martelli 1981: 160; Craddock 1984: 215; Becker Forthcoming, 2016b). Ironically, the tombs that mineral wealth helped to build initially would, in time, come to be covered up by iron slag during the third to first centuries BCE. These tombs were located adjacent to the Gulf of Baratti, Populonia's port, and iron workers used this same funerary space to dump the nearly two million tons of slag that resulted from the processing of Elban ore.

The highly productive nature of the Elban mines and subsequent iron processing are then exemplified by the reappropriation of the area of once-prized tombs of earlier generations at Populonia. Repurposing for industrial use land that was once dedicated for something as important to the community as elite tombs reveals the continued productivity of the Elban mines (and Populonia's role in the production of iron). The legend surrounding Elban mines is certainly not without foundation. Importantly, it is clear that both Greek and Roman authors were impressed by the natural wealth of Etruria, from the abundant metal resources to the very bountiful lands and flocks.

Thus, a number of ancient authors point out different aspects of the wealth of the Etruscans, which, in general, are not an exaggeration. But one might consider why so many authors discuss this topic at all and how many of them had first-hand knowledge of Etruria. On the one hand, while a few merchants may have travelled to Etruscan shores for trading purposes, even more foreigners abroad probably imported Etruscan products such as grain or wine. To such international consumers, information about Etruria and its environment would be of interest. To approach Etruscan international visibility from another angle (see further, [Chapter 6](#)), the Etruscans are the only non-Greek culture to have established treasuries in Delphi. These structures are likely to have incited further curiosity about the Etruscans and their economy (Strabo *Geography* 5.1.7; 9.3.8; Pliny *Natural History* 3.120).

3. Etruscan Dominance

Another *topos* attached to the Etruscans looks back to the time of the acme of Etruscan commercial power in the sixth century BCE (Pallottino 1984: 124–127; Liébert 2006: 151–153). Livy, writing over 500 years later, acknowledged that, “before the Roman empire, the power of the Etruscans extended widely on land and sea” (5.33.7). Indeed, he continues that their power was so great that they gave a name to both the Tyrrhenian Sea and the

Adriatic Sea (the latter named after the town of Adria). Cato the Elder also considered this time to be one when “almost all of Italy was under the dominion of the Etruscans” (Servius 11.567).

Archaeological data have shown, moreover, that Archaic Rome, just across the Tiber, was but a small and local settlement in terms of reach, when the cities of Etruria flourished. As Larissa Bonfante (2003: 90) explains, “Latin literature still reflects the experience, in the archaic period of Roman history, of finding themselves across the river from one of the richest people in the Mediterranean.” In spite of the monumentalization of the nascent civic center of Rome of the sixth century BCE, which according to legend was led by three kings of Etruscan descent, we can still observe that some Roman accounts look across the Tiber to admire the fields that were perceived to be more fertile than their own (Livy 5.24.5). While the *ager Romanus* is separated from Etruscan territories by a mere riverine boundary, nevertheless it would seem that, based at least upon the posturing of Roman authors centuries later, they wanted their readers to perceive an enormous gulf separating the Roman culture from the Etruscan one.

4. Etruscan Opulence and Decadence

Etruscan wealth, according to other ancient authors, inevitably led to conspicuous display, and purportedly immoral decadence. Posidonius, as preserved in the history of Diodorus Siculus, presents the association between wealth and an immoderate lifestyle best. He first explains that Etruscan land provides for every crop, even beyond what was needed for sustenance. This excess allows for the Etruscans to have banquets twice daily with elaborate and expensive furnishings and vessels (even silver drinking cups), as well as a large number of slaves as attendants (*Library of History* 5.40.3). Posidonius then proceeds to explain that the Etruscans are not like their ancestors, who were strong and powerful in war. Instead, Etruscans devoted themselves to “spending their lives in drinking and unmanly entertainments” (5.40.4). Posidonius’s description finds parallels in other Greek sources, which partly seek to explain how the Etruscans, who were so dominant through the sixth century BCE, came to lose their international trading and political prominence (Flower 1994: 190–191). For these authors, the loss of dominance that followed the Etruscan defeat at the Battle of Cumae, and the waning presence of the Etruscans on the Tyrrhenian Sea and in central and southern Italy, were not the desired explanations behind the Etruscans’ diminished stature. Instead, the Etruscans lost their international prestige because of their excessive luxury, Posidonius’s *τρυφή* [*truphē*], and the moral degeneracy that this entailed.

While Posidonius offers an ethnographic account to explain how wealth led

the Etruscans to engage in degenerate behavior in their daily life, other authors use this *topos* to explain an important historical event. The city of Volsinii (see further, [Chapter 9](#)) was wealthy (*opulenta*) and even well-ordered in terms of its customs and laws, but it “fell into decline because of luxury” (*luxuria prolapsa est*) and “swerved into an abyss of wrongs and indecencies” (Valerius Maximus 9.1 ext.2). Both the anonymous author of *De viris illustribus* (36) and Paulus Orosius, in his *History against the Pagans* (4.5), make note that Volsinii “was nearly destroyed because of excessive indulgence.”

While different authors describe the factors that would lead to the downfall of Volsinii in 264 BCE, only Cassius Dio provides a cause: he says that its leaders became lazy to the point that they let their own slaves both govern the city and carry out military campaigns (*Roman History* 10.42). The degeneracy of the men of Volsinii even allows these slaves to marry the wives of their masters. Just as in Posidonius’s account, these Etruscans are no longer interested in warfare. These men, now without power, choose to seek the help of the Romans – who decide, in turn, to raze the city. The negligence and indolence of the city’s rulers, along with their inability to help themselves, finds parallels with the degeneracy described by Posidonius. To these authors, therefore, luxury caused the leading men of Volsinii to become soft and effete, so much so that they could not serve in the military or control their own slaves. Just as luxury was thought to have undermined the dominance of the Etruscans in general, here the negative effects of *τρυφὴ* are offered up as leading to the last days of Volsinii.

Another text that treats Etruscan *τρυφὴ* is that of Athenaeus, which preserves the fourth century BCE work of Theopompus of Chios. A number of scholars have pointed out that this account, along with other Greek ones from the fourth century BCE, fully developed the association between the Etruscans and *τρυφὴ*, upon which later authors, like Posidonius, expounded (e.g., Harris 1971: 14–15, 20–22; Farney 2007: 134–138). It seems likely that the later authors relied far more on the written work of authors like Theopompus than on any direct knowledge about the Etruscans and their culture.

In expressing his views about how the deleterious effects of luxury had a negative impact on the Etruscans, Theopompus writes:

Further, they [the Etruscan women] dine, not with their own husbands, but with any men who happen to be present, and they pledge with wine any whom they wish. They are also terribly bibulous and are very good-looking ... When they get together for companionship or family parties they do as follows: first of all, after they have stopped drinking and are ready to go to bed, the servants bring in to them, the lamps still being lighted, sometimes female prostitutes, sometimes very beautiful boys, sometimes also their wives; and when they have enjoyed these, the

servants then introduce to them lusty young men who in their turn consort with them ... Now they consort very eagerly, to be sure, with women; much more, however, do they enjoy consorting with boys and striplings. For in their country these latter are very good looking, because they live in luxury and keep their bodies smooth (Theopompus quoted in Athenaeus *The Learned Banqueters* 12.517d–518a (translation from Gulick 1933)).

While there was exaggeration in Theopompus's account, some points are in keeping with elements of Etruscan reality (Heurgon 1964: 34; Flower 1994: 176; Cornelius Nepos *Alcibiades* 11= F288; Plutarch F 333). Archaeological data confirm that banquets were not only a part of normal daily life but also that they could reach sizable dimensions. Two structures dated to the seventh century BCE – the building at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) known as OC1/ Residence (see further, [Chapter 8](#)) and a house located in northern Latium at Ficana – could have accommodated at least 20 to 30 banqueters, respectively (Rathje 1983; Berkin 2003: 121). In addition, Berkin points out that the banquet service from Poggio Civitate could have accommodated up to 59 people if some of the diners used bucchero cups and others Attic ones. Similarly, the Golini I tomb of Orvieto (Volsinii), which dates to the middle of the fourth century BCE, and is thus contemporaneous to Theopompus, offers scenes of a banquet being prepared, with multiple slaves preparing the food and setting out vessels (Steingraber 1985: 278 n. 32). Given the absence of an Etruscan literary or historical record, such archaeological evidence provides a useful check against Greek and Roman sources, and in this case, the tradition of the Etruscan banquet is real.

But Theopompus censures the very open sexuality that he says occurred among the Etruscans, wherein husbands mated with wives, or prostitutes, or young boys. Michael Flower (1994: 190) addresses these statements, when he writes that, “although it is not impossible that *some* members of the Etruscan aristocracy were capable of giving an orgy of such dimensions (the capacity for decadence among the idle rich should never be underestimated), Theopompus claims that *all* Etruscans lived in the described manner.” Livy also invokes the loose reputation of Etruscan women at the end of his first book, when the daughters-in-law of Tarquinius Superbus are seen enjoying a luxurious banquet (much like the women in Theopompus's account), while the quintessentially Roman wife Lucretia spins wool by lamplight (Livy 1.52.9; Bonfante Warren 1973a: 95). With such a story, Livy contrasts the simple lifestyle of a Roman matron with the degenerate Etruscan lifestyle of the king's daughters-in-law, thereby using alleged Etruscan decadence as a foil for Roman moderation (see also [Chapter 21](#)).

Another aspect of Theopompus's account that stands out is the freedom that elite Etruscan women enjoyed in their domestic lives. Unlike women of the same status in the Greek world who dined in gender-segregated settings (see Goldberg 1999: 142; Lysias 1.9.3; Cicero *Verrines* 2.1.66), high-ranking

women not only joined their husbands at banquets but this fact was also celebrated in the iconography of a select number of tomb paintings from the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE (Bonfante Warren 1973b) as well as in the creation of the *sposi* sarcophagus type, which remained popular from the sixth to the first centuries BCE (see images in [Chapters 22](#) and [24](#)). Decorative terracotta panels depicted banquets, such as the surviving examples from the Archaic building complex at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) (see [Figure 23.3](#)). Thus, Theopompus's description of the presence of Etruscan women at banquets certainly represents an historical reality, albeit one very different from the custom of the symposium that he viewed as the norm.

From Posidonius's unmanly Etruscans to the degenerate leaders of Volsinii and the unruly women described by both Livy and Theopompus, Greek and Roman authors constructed and presented a consistent cultural stereotype of the Etruscans. This stereotype can also be found in the labels that Catullus and Virgil give them: the *obesus Etruscus*, "the plump Etruscan" and the *pinguis Tyrrhenus*, "the fat Etruscan" (Catullus *Carmen* 39.11; Virgil *Georgics* 2.193; see [Chapters 13](#) and [22](#)). All of these descriptions further serve to make the Etruscans appear to be "other" than the Greeks and Romans, as well as foreigners, despite being Italic natives.

Indeed, the contrast between Lucretia and the Etruscan princesses reveals a perceived difference in the normative standards for each culture. The *τρυφή* and cultural softness of the Etruscans finds the best parallel in the cultural stereotypes the Greeks and Romans regularly assigned to the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, as well as others famous for their "excessive" tendencies. For example, the Sybarites of southern Italy, who personified luxurious living in the mindset of their colonial Greek neighbors, were said to prefer the Etruscans because of the similarities in their "excessive, luxurious lifestyles."⁴

The connection these authors make between the wealth of the Etruscans and the reasons they cite for their decline is one that Cyrus the Great, Persian king of the sixth century BCE, could have made. According to Herodotus, Cyrus the Great believed that "soft" places made men soft: he is credited with saying that, "the same land cannot yield both wonderful crops and men who are noble and courageous in war" (Herodotus 9.122). To Greeks intellectuals, such "soft" places were often located in the east. *Airs, Waters, and Places*, a late-fifth-century BCE work in the Hippocratic corpus, also connects the environment to cultural dispositions. The treatise discusses Asia in terms of its mild climate; it is a place where everything grows in abundance, that is large and beautiful, and where the cattle are plentiful. The description of this bountiful environment corresponds with the very qualities of the Etruscan landscape that were celebrated by ancient authors such as Strabo and Livy. But the effect of such an idyllic environment is not favorable, the treatise explains, for, under such conditions, manliness and industry cannot occur in

either the natives or the immigrants who live there (Hippocrates *Airs, Waters, and Places* 12). It is perhaps for this reason that authors such as Posidonius (as quoted by Diodorus Siculus) believed that similar circumstances had caused the Etruscans' decline, dooming them to lose not only cities like Volsinii but even control of "almost all of Italy" (according to Servius's description).

Not only did Etruscan wealth and conspicuous consumption evoke eastern parallels but Herodotus (1.94) even went so far as to suggest that the Etruscans descended from an eastern people, the Lydians (see further, [Chapters 13 and 14](#)). The association between the Etruscans and a purported foreign and eastern origin is in keeping with some of the cultural stereotypes that various ancient Greek and Roman authors perpetuated about them. This can also be detected in the account of Herodotus: the Lydian progenitors of the Etruscans were inventors of dice games, a pursuit that is synonymous with idleness.

5. Etruscan Wealth at War

The perceived Etruscan preference for conspicuous display apparently could even be traced into the field of war, as different historical accounts relate. According to Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Gaius Mucius, who comes to acquire the cognomen Scaevola, famously infiltrated the camp of the late sixth century BCE Etruscan king, Lars Porsenna, with the aim of killing him. But when Mucius entered the camp, he could not determine for sure who Porsenna was and so he killed Porsenna's scribe by mistake. The latter was sitting upon a raised platform and wearing a purple garment, which was nearly identical to the costume of the king (*scriba cum rege sedens pari fere ornatu*).⁵ In this narrative, Mucius represents the comparative austerity of the Romans, and his misapprehension of Etruscan dress seems to be a mistake that any contemporary Roman might well have made (Colonna 1976). This mistake represents an attempt by these authors to set the ostentation of Etruscan culture against Roman standards. Interestingly, a parallel can be found in Herodotus's account of the Spartan general, Pausanias, who had both a Persian meal (along with fine furnishings) and a Spartan meal prepared in order to contrast the lifestyles and priorities of each culture (Herodotus 9.82; Vasunia 2009: 1836). Livy and Dionysius further emphasize the comparative opulence of the Etruscans in the descriptions of the elaborate Etruscan camp, which is arranged like a city with public and private buildings, and well-stocked with provisions (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 5.34.4; Livy 2.14.3).

Apparently, the Etruscan preference for luxury followed them on other campaigns, for, in the early fifth century BCE, when Lucius Aemilius took

over the military camp of Veii, the Romans found a wealth of spoils greater than any previous battle, consisting of tents, beasts of burden, and slaves. Dionysius of Halicarnassus explains these spoils, which seemed frivolous to him given their military context, with a familiar refrain: “for the Tyrrhenians were a people of dainty and expensive tastes, both at home and in the field carrying about with them, besides the necessities, costly and artistic articles of all kinds designed for pleasure and luxury” (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 9.16, trans. Cary 1945). The opulent camps of the Veientes and that of Lars Porsenna himself recall an eastern precedent and, in particular, the camp of the Persian king Xerxes. (Herodotus 9.70; 9.82; this tent was given by Xerxes to the Persian commander Mardonius). Similarly, when the Romans again fight against Etruscans at Sutrium (Sutri) in 310 BCE, Livy (9.35.8) writes that they confiscated a camp “with huge spoils” (*cum praeda ingenti*).

Can three separate instances of conspicuously elaborate Etruscan military camps be accidental? It is possible that the Etruscans favored elaborate military camps and that these camps stood in stark contrast to the comparatively austere camps of the Romans. The hope of such well-stocked camps would, indeed, have inspired Roman soldiers to fight more aggressively so that they could eventually take part in those spoils. But at the same time, these camps could simply be a construction of ancient authors that served to reinforce existing cultural stereotypes about the Etruscans. Because our only source of evidence for Etruscan camps is literary, it is impossible to investigate their original contexts and evaluate their presumed opulence. In this case, the resemblance between these camps and the camp of Xerxes associates the Etruscans with eastern precedents of soft and degenerate behavior, in the same way as the aforementioned banqueting scenes.

6. Lars Porsenna and Conspicuous Consumption

Having surveyed various categories of Etruscan excess and opulence as described by both Greek and Roman authors, it is clear not only that certain stereotypes frequently occur but also that the idea of the sheer quantity of Etruscan wealth served as an attractive literary trope. In this light, Pliny’s discussion of the Tomb of Lars Porsenna at Chiusi proves to be especially enlightening. Pliny (*Natural History* 36.19.91–93) begins his description of this massive, labyrinthine tomb by comparing it with tombs built by eastern kings. But in the case of Lars Porsenna’s tomb, Pliny says that Porsenna’s vanity, which is revealed by his excessive building and expense, surpassed even their creations. According to Pliny’s account, the Tomb of Porsenna was a massive square monument, each side measuring 300 feet; it was also 50 feet high and topped by five massive pyramids, which were, in turn, surmounted

by four additional pyramids. Inside the monument there was a labyrinth that required a ball of thread to navigate. Porsenna's tomb did not survive to Pliny's time, but many scholars in subsequent centuries have searched for it, trying to imagine its form and appearance ([Figure 20.1](#)).

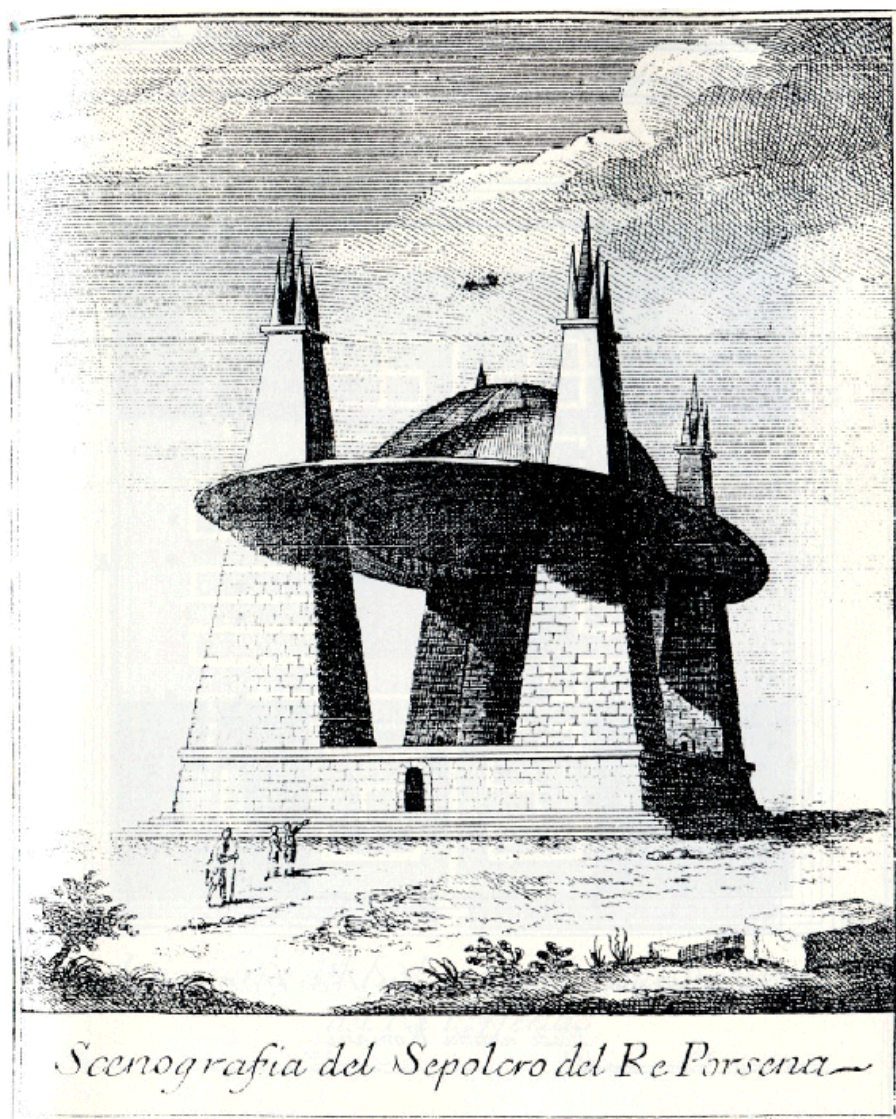


Figure 20.1 Reconstruction of the tomb of Lars Porsenna, 1791.

Drawing: Fabrizio 1987: fig. 39.

While archaeologists have yet to discover the Tomb of Porsenna, the wealth he is purported to have expended on it does not seem out of place among the tombs of the late Archaic and Classical periods still visible outside of Chiusi and neighboring Chianciano Terme. For example, the Tomb of the Monkey (c.480 BCE) is a massive four-chambered tomb with a ceiling soaring to over

10.5 feet in height (Steingraber 1996: 273).

What is also of interest here is Pliny's ultimate statement about Porsenna's tomb: he describes its construction as an "insane folly, as it was to have courted fame by spending for the benefit of none and to have exhausted furthermore the resources of a kingdom" (*Natural History* 36.19.93). Pliny finds the excess of Lars Porsenna to be deplorable because he spent so much for no apparent benefit. Just as Greek and Roman authors derided wanton spending on personal banquets, now the cause for censure is spending so much on a personal tomb. For Romans contemporary to Lars Porsenna, spending so much on a tomb was not socially or even legally permissible. In addition, during the fifth-century BCE, concerns about extravagant funerary practices led to the inclusion of sumptuary laws in the Twelve Tables (Colonna 1981: 229). For example, a funeral could use not more than three veils, one small purple tunic, ten flute players, and no festoons or incense boxes (Table X.3 and 6). Wealthy Romans were encouraged to spend their money publicly, on their cities and sanctuaries, rather than on their tombs (Ampolo 1984: 469; Smith 1996: 186–187). This viewpoint is later exemplified by Cicero, who states that, according to Roman ideals, "the Roman people hate private luxury and prefer public grandeur" (*odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit* (*Pro Murena* 36.76)).

Thus, for Pliny, the colossal scale of this tomb and its embellishments (e.g., the layers of pyramids) represent a clear instance of conspicuous consumption that may well have shocked the sensibility of archaic Roman patricians, who we can safely assume were conditioned to adopt *mores* similar to those invoked by Cicero in the above passage, a fact that is clearly demonstrated by the archaic elites who financed the Forum landfill project and the monumentalization of Rome's Capitolium while seemingly eschewing monuments dedicated to personal glory. This stark contrast in terms of elite behavior further highlights the cultural gulf that separated Roman elites from their Etruscan peers, with each group tending to deploy their resources so as to reinforce the social prerogatives of their kinship group. Pliny, removed in time from Porsenna's day, nonetheless may relate to the accounts of Porsenna's legendary tomb in the way that he does since he has been witness to sumptuous building programs of the first century CE, some of which serve the public aims in the spirit of Cicero's message, while others, notably the notorious program of Nero, tended toward private luxury. Thus, for Pliny, the Tomb of Lars Porsenna functioned as a cautionary example, a warning against excess, since Porsenna's wealth did not serve the community.

The huge expense represented by Lars Porsenna's tomb, and Pliny's reaction to it, are, therefore, in keeping with other negative commentary associated with Etruscans and their wealth. Porsenna's choice to spend so much on a tomb falls along the same continuum of personal, conspicuous consumption

as Etruscan banquets. Surely some aspect of Pliny's account must be credible; it is reasonable to hypothesize that such a ruler would have been buried in a large tomb constructed in the manner favored by his contemporaries – even if the scale and design described by Pliny does not correspond with Etruscan architectural conventions. By elaborating on the excessiveness of the Tomb of Porsenna, Pliny aims to dissuade his contemporaries from thinking about the standards of living that once supported Etruscan elites and their lavish lifestyles, thereby reinforcing upper class Roman standards.

7. Conclusion

A review of this collection of assertions and statements made by Greek and Roman authors about Etruscan wealth enables us to grasp, from the Greco-Roman point of view, the foreign and distorted impressions of not only Etruscan daily life but also of the Etruscan economy in general. And while the ancient commentary on the natural resources of Etruria that allowed for the accrual of a large part of Etruscan wealth is “factual,” it is also tinged with exaggeration, as in the case of the mines at Elba. Beyond just the list of natural resources, discussions about Etruscan displays of wealth, especially concerning their elaborate banquets and the Tomb of Porsenna, may also prove to be informative about the socio-economic realities of the Etruscan world. Certainly, Etruscan banqueting did occur, and massive tombs were built in and around Chiusi at the time when Lars Porsenna is believed to have lived. Thus some of the Greek and Roman authors' statements are not just cultural constructions manufactured out of whole cloth, even if they do not always reflect accurate, first-hand observation. While Theopompus and Posidonius are interested in critiquing the moral and ethical consequences of a sumptuous and degenerate lifestyle, they are not interested in understanding the reasons why the Etruscan elite spent so much outright on banquets or elaborate tombs. These accounts were written without an interest in the socioeconomic conditions that endowed these Etruscan traditions with sociocultural valence. For the Etruscan elite, sponsoring an elaborate banquet cemented social ties between their larger community, and such a banquet would be reciprocated in time by others (see further, [Chapter 8](#) on the evidence at Poggio Civitate). Elaborate tombs provided for the display not only of the resources of the deceased, but also of their surviving family; these shared memories were thus preserved by means of the monument. And if the Tomb of Lars Porsenna did, in fact, exist, it probably also would have served ritual purposes for funerary rites and the ancestor cult (Steingraber 2013 and his [Chapter 11](#) here).

Pliny, however, does not focus on these aspects of the Etruscans' culture: he is not interested in the reasons why Porsenna built that tomb, save for a

dismissive attribution to vanity. Instead, this Roman author is concerned about the level of conspicuous consumption and the disposal of wealth. This is a behavior that good Romans should scrupulously (and explicitly) avoid. Similarly, Theopompus presents Etruscan banquets, banqueters, and daily life in general by emphasizing the supposed excesses of these Etruscan behaviors, behaviors that were different than, and therefore potentially threatening to, Greek norms. The account of Posidonius, as well as the stories surrounding the fall of Volsinii, also served moral purposes insofar as they provided explanations for what might happen to those who adopted soft and immoderate lifestyles.

As much as these accounts center upon the Etruscans, they served to exemplify and problematize behaviors that Greeks and Romans found less desirable in a broader sense. By exploring these traits through the medium of often hostile accounts of the Etruscans, Greek and Latin authors are interested in projecting and thereby reinforcing the social conventions that they found to be acceptable in their respective cultures. Thus these accounts not only reflect (even as they occasionally distort) aspects of Etruscan culture but also, importantly, they reveal much about what the Greeks and Romans decided they definitely did not want to be.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Few modern resources exist dedicated to the Etruscan economy *per se*, but references to different aspects of industry such as agriculture and mining can be found in the text. Studies of elite display at the Etruscan banquet and, indeed the tradition of the banquet in central Italy, should begin with Rathje 1995 and Zaccaria Ruggiu 2003. Rathje 1983 and Berkin 2003 provide valuable discussions of banqueting services found *in situ* at Ficana and Poggio Civitate (Murlo). For Etruscan women at banquets and their role in daily life, consult Bonfante Warren 1973a and 1973b as well as Rallo 1989, a collection of 11 chapters on women on subjects ranging from women's tombs, women in art, women's domestic work, and other topics. For further readings of Greek and Latin authors who mention Etruria and Etruscan topics, Buonamici 1939 is indispensable. While this collection comprises a great amount of sources, it does not offer commentary and only provides the ancient sources in Italian. For an examination of the *topos* of Etruscan luxury in ancient Greek and Roman literature, see, most recently, Liébert 2006.

NOTES

- 1 Livy 5.33 and 5.36. See also Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 13.11.2; and Plutarch *Life of Camillus* 17.2.
- 2 Praise for the wealth of the city of Cerveteri can be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 3.58.1 and for Volsinii see: Valerius Maximus *Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 9.1 ext. 2; Florus 1.16; Orosius *Histories against the Pagans* 4.5.3; Pliny *Natural History* 2.57; Zonaras 8.7. Similarly, Veii (after its fall) is described as “the wealthiest city of the Etruscan name” (Livy 5.22.8).
- 3 Craddock (1984: 215) notes that copper slag has been found at Elba. Corretti and Taddei doubt that Elba ever produced copper, unless for a very local need. They suggest, instead, that perhaps this Greek author conflated copper sources in the nearby mainland with Elba (2001: 249–250).
- 4 Diodorus Siculus *Historical Library* 8.18.1; Athenaeus *The Learned Banqueters* 12.519c; see Athenaeus 12.518d on the Sybarites themselves.
- 5 Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 5.28.2; Livy 2.12.7. Three Roman kings, Romulus, Tullus Hostilius, Tarquinius Priscus, are each credited with adopting purple garments to mark Roman kings (Pliny *Natural History* 9.63; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 2.34.2 and 3.61–62). Etruscan magistrates used such garments (Martial

Epigrams 1.6.7) and the adoption of ornate, purple garments by both Tullus Hostilius and Tarquinius Priscus is connected in both cases to the Etruscans (Pliny *Natural History* 9.63 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 3.61–62).

CHAPTER 21

Tanaquil

The Conception and Construction of an Etruscan Matron

Gretchen E. Meyers

1. Introduction

Etruscan women are among the most talked-about of ancient women, acknowledged both in antiquity and today for their public roles and relative equality in their society. At the same time, they are also among the most enigmatic – difficult to understand due to a lack of any direct literary accounts of their lives and reanimated through a complicated array of ancient characterizations, visual representations and gendered grave goods. Many discussions of Etruscan women also include the oft-quoted fourth-century BCE account by Theopompus of Chios preserved in Athenaeus, which can be seen as a precursor for a timeless fascination with their extraordinary social behavior:

Sharing wives is an established Etruscan custom. Etruscan women take particular care of their bodies and exercise often, sometimes along with the men, and sometimes by themselves. It is not a disgrace for them to be seen naked. They do not share their couches with their husbands but with the other men who happen to be present, and they propose toasts to anyone they choose. They are expert drinkers and very attractive (Athenaeus *The Deipnosophists* 12.517; translation: Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 88).

Subsequent historiographical and archaeological analyses, however, have tempered this prurient ancient viewpoint. Most scholars agree that Theopompus's full account can be viewed as rhetorical exaggeration, motivated by his disdain for the Etruscans generally and a desire to attribute the decline of their sea power in the early fourth century BCE to cultural immorality and extravagance (Flower 1994: 189–191). Instead, among scholars a variety of more reasoned portraits of the ancient Etruscan woman prevails, from an individual with greater equality and visibility than her Greek and Roman sisters – depicted and honored as a spouse within the competitive display of an emergent aristocratic class – to a woman whose social status was, in fact, remarkably similar to her Greek and Roman counterparts, but distorted through the ancient lens of Etruscan “otherness” (in particular, see

Bonfante 1981, 1994; Rallo 1989; Amann 2000; Haynes 2000; Rathje 2000; Izzet 2007, 2012).

Ancient literary sources thus pose a particularly thorny problem for the study of Etruscan women. Outside of inscriptions, few Etruscan texts survive, and the ancient written accounts of Etruscan women that do exist are authored largely by Greeks and Romans (on inscriptions see [Chapter 14](#)). Many scholars have pointed out the methodological problems with these sources (Amann 2000; Izzet 2012), arguing that the accounts of Etruscan women in the texts of these authors cannot be seen as realia, but rather as reflections of the values of Greek or Roman society. For example, with regard to the portrayal of Etruscan women in Book 1 of Livy's *History of Rome*, Vedia Izzet (2012: 71) claims "there is simply nothing in his text that can tell us what ancient Etruscan women were really like. It may be disappointing to recognize this point: Livy presents us with a window not onto Etruscan society but onto his own." As a consequence of this bias, Izzet argues, Etruscologists traditionally have not properly contextualized the literary sources available to them, resulting in a predominantly distorted picture of Etruscan women as unusually liberated and/or powerful that is more the product of the underlying social and political concerns of ancient Greeks and Romans. She suggests that a more judicious approach to Etruscan women can be found in the theoretical approaches of archaeology and gender studies (Izzet 2012: 77).

This assessment brings up an important question for Etruscologists. Do ancient accounts of Etruscan women – or Etruscan practices more widely – hold any value for us? Chronological disparity, bias, and methodological concerns are just some of the many pitfalls that they pose. Certainly if we expect these sources to offer insight into Etruscan culture from a strictly positivist perspective, we must heed the warnings of the many scholars who caution us against blindly accepting them and thus avoiding blatant misinterpretation. Such a conundrum is not unique to the study of Etruscan women; for example, we can also look to the complexity of historical accounts of ancient Persian women for comparison. Here, too, scholars grapple with a nexus of different sources describing the women of the Persian courts. However, as Maria Brosius (1996: 11–12) concludes in her study of women in ancient Persia, diversity of evidence can be valuable when the consideration of complementary source material in unison may "widen the basis for historical analysis and offer another dimension to the discussion." Thus, rather than avoiding the ancient literary sources about Etruscan women, we may utilize them to enliven other types of evidence for female lives in ancient Etruria. If we approach these literary sources for the lives of Etruscan women fully aware of the highly constructed nature of their depiction, perhaps they can stimulate new questions about ancient perceptions of Etruscan gender that might re-inform the valid material evidence.

In this chapter, Tanaquil, perhaps the most famous “historical” Etruscan woman, is offered as an example of such an approach. Indeed her portrayal in Roman sources, when considered in tandem with archaeological evidence, can be quite useful in deepening our interpretation of public and personal identity among elite Etruscan woman. In particular, Roman literary accounts about Tanaquil as a producer of elaborate textiles for ceremonies marking life-stages such as marriage and death have been written off too casually as nothing more than a generic Roman association with virtuous “female” behavior. Rather, this aspect of Tanaquil’s portrayal in Roman sources may have significance outside of the standard view of textile production as a symbolic mark of a woman’s domestic virtue. In fact, Tanaquil may represent a Roman conception of the Etruscan elite matron specifically as one who participated in and shaped her own society through the creation of ceremonial and ritual garments.

2. Tanaquil, the Etruscan Queen

Undoubtedly, the best-known portrait of the Etruscan queen Tanaquil comes from Book 1 of Livy’s *History of Rome* (1.34, 39, 41), composed at the beginning of the Augustan age.¹ Other contemporaneous authors, such as the historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (3.47 ff., 4.2 ff.) and the poet Ovid (*Fasti* 6.629), also reference her story. A brief summary of the late first century BCE–early first century CE representations of Tanaquil is appropriate here.

Tanaquil was of elite Etruscan blood, born and raised in the Etruscan city of Tarquinia. She married a gentleman named Lucumo, who was socially beneath her due to his parentage – born from an Etruscan mother and a Greek immigrant father, Demaratus of Corinth. Neither Tanaquil nor her husband were content to bear the social tribulations associated with this stigma and at Tanaquil’s urging, they set out for Rome, a new city where anyone, regardless of birth, could rise to the top. As they approached the very edge of the city, an eagle swooped down, plucked the cap from Lucumo’s head, flew aloft with it and then returned it gently to his head. Tanaquil, skilled in the art of prophecy, immediately understood this portent as foretelling Lucumo’s future importance in Rome. Upon their arrival, he took the name Tarquinius (Priscus) and ingratiated himself to King Ancus Marcius. Eventually, through a series of somewhat underhanded and persuasive moves, Tarquinius managed to usurp the kingship from the royal princes upon the death of Ancus Marcius. In Livy’s account, Tanaquil’s influence did not abate during her husband’s reign, but continued when she used her prophetic skills yet again to identify his royal successor – a slave boy in the household, whom she recognized based on a prodigy of flames surrounding his head. Ultimately she maneuvered this boy, Servius Tullius, to the throne by covering up her own

husband's murder by his former rivals, compelling Servius Tullius to take up the kingship, and convincing the Roman populace to accept him as Tarquinius Priscus's successor through an outward display of royal symbols and garments.

Scholars have both championed and disregarded this narrative about Tanaquil as evidence for Etruscan female behavior. While some consider parts of her story to reflect typical Etruscan female behavior (Heurgon 1964; Bonfante 1994), others propose that the drama of Tanaquil's tale derives from alternative sources, such as Greek literary tropes or the sociopolitical context of Augustan Rome (Ogilvie 1965; Amann 2000). Most notably, Richard Bauman (1994: 188) has argued that Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus added the entire episode detailing the concealment of Tarquinius Priscus's death in order to secure the succession of Servius Tullius as king so as to "establish a respectable antecedent for similar drama surrounding the death of Augustus," in which Livia similarly concealed her husband's death. As the scholarly debate makes clear, the dramatic events surrounding Tanaquil's presentation in Livy and other Roman accounts are simultaneously intriguing and problematic. While the narratives offer glimpses of practices that seem to correspond with material evidence from Etruria, they also are very much a product of the annalistic tradition, Greek literary tropes, and Roman cultural values. The following examples suffice to demonstrate the complexity of the historical portrayal of Tanaquil and the resulting issues she poses as a putative model for Etruscan women's lives.

One of Tanaquil's most distinctive behaviors is her ability to read and interpret divine signs, highlighted by both Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Livy mentions her talents explicitly when he refers to her as a woman "skilled in heavenly prophecy" (*perita ... caelestium prodigiorum mulier*) and specifically emphasizes the connection of this behavior with Etruscans by adding "as all Etruscans" (*ut volgo Etrusci*) (*History of Rome* 34.9). Further elaboration is found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus. In addition to her interpretive guidance en route to Rome, Tanaquil also deciphers prodigies surrounding the birth of Servius Tullius, which are not included in Livy's account. As Dionysius (4.2–13) rather skeptically tells it, Servius is conceived after a phantom phallus appears in the royal hearth, witnessed by the slave woman, Ocrisia. Tanaquil interprets this as a divine sign, and urges Ocrisia to have intercourse with the phallus and thus conceive a child (Servius Tullius), who will be superior to mortals. This story, including Tanaquil's role as an interpreter and catalyst for the union between Ocrisia and the divine phallus (in some cases identified as Vulcan), is also recorded in Plutarch (*Morals* 10) and Ovid (*Fasti* 6.627–636). Together, although there is some variation in the details, these textual sources agree that, at least by the Augustan period, there was a connection of some sort between Tanaquil's Etruscan heritage and divinization.

Whether or not Tanaquil's portrayal as a practitioner of haruspicy derives

from a perceived reality about Etruscan women is a more difficult question and must be considered outside of the ancient annalistic tradition alone. Some scholars have noted that, while there is ample evidence of Etruscan male priests and diviners, there is little to suggest that Etruscan women were perceived to be gifted in the same craft (Amann 2000). For example, Robert Ogilvie (1965: 144) posits that the assignment of prophetic skills to a woman is a Roman attempt to distance Tanaquil from their women, and is likely modeled on Greek mythological prototypes, such as Medea. But Tanaquil's behavior may also resonate with actual Etruscan practice. Although no direct evidence for Etruscan priestesses exists, suggestive traces have been found in the archaeological record. Inscriptional evidence from fourth century Vulci (particularly the Tomb of the Inscriptions) suggests that the title, *hatrencu*, was associated with a female religious office (Nielsen 1990; Lundeen 2006). In addition, Nancy de Grummond (2006) has argued for the presence of female priests and suggested (2000) that the popular female grave good of a bronze mirror may be linked to the practice of prophecy. While these examples date much later than the Archaic Tanaquil, they nevertheless provide a context for both public and private religious behavior on the part of Etruscan women. Still others argue that Tanaquil's link to divinity is not that of a mortal who can interpret the divine but that, by the late Republic, of a mortal component of a goddess, either Fortuna or perhaps a fertility deity (Gage 1953; Coarelli 1992; Briquel 1998, Hersch 2010a). The lack of clarity with regard to the nature of divinity in Tanaquil's story (either as an interpreter or as a divinity herself) highlights the complicated nature of her portrayal in the historians. While the Roman sources indicate a clear association between Tanaquil and the divine, it is unclear to what extent this component of her story reflects true Etruscan practices for elite women or Roman perceptions of Etruscans within the late Republican–Augustan cultural milieu. Certainly, the ancient practice of divinization would leave little trace in the archaeological record. Without the tantalizing mention of Tanaquil's prophetic skills we might not even be inclined to interrogate the limited material evidence we do have for female prophetesses and priestesses. In this way, despite their limits, the Roman sources prompt us to raise questions about Etruscan women that might be otherwise overlooked.

A second aspect of Tanaquil preserved by Roman historians, which is similarly complex, is her visibility as a wife. Referred to as a “kingmaker” by Paul Martin (1985), Tanaquil certainly seems to be a prototype for the manipulative, ambitious female that often characterizes later accounts of Imperial Roman women, such as Tacitus's Livia. Scant early references to Tanaquil mention her spousal role in Tarquin's story and emphasize the importance she played as his wife in his ultimate success (Amann 2000). For example, Polybius (6.11a.7) may draw upon Fabius Pictor (frag. 11b, Peter), who seems to be the earliest source for Tanaquil's name, when he refers to Tarquin's “useful wife.” Surely this tradition is the root of Tanaquil's zealous

promotion and manipulation of both Tarquin's and later Servius Tullius's claim to the throne in the accounts of both Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. However, Tanaquil's predilection for family matters is not limited to behind-the-scenes political machinations on behalf of the men in her life. She also attends to her family at key ceremonial or transitional moments, such as when Ennius records her washing the feet of her deceased husband (Servius *Commentary on the Aeneid* 6.219).

Here again, as with the portrayal of her prophetic skills, Tanaquil's wifely and family-focused duties must be considered through the Roman lens in which they are found. For example, given Livy's famous statement that the purpose of history is the promotion of moral *exempla* (pr. 10), the women of early Rome may be viewed as models of either appropriate or inappropriate Roman female behavior. As Elaine Fantham (1994: 225) states, Romans "constructed their legends of the dynasty from Tarquinia to reflect women's power both used and misused." The ambitious wifely coercions of Tanaquil could be considered to fall squarely into the latter category, particularly as Livy places her in such proximity to his exemplum of female virtue par excellence, Lucretia. In this way Livy's Tanaquil warns against the interference of women in Roman public life and politics, as the brutal deaths of her male pawns, Tarquinius Priscus and Servius Tullius, surely attest (Stevenson 2011). Such ambitious pride is a characteristic associated in literary portrayals of Etruscans as "others" more generally (Bittarello 2009) and it may not be a surprise that it is attached so freely to a woman. Thus, Tanaquil serves as a highly effective anti-exemplum for Romans not only due to her gender but also her foreignness. Nevertheless, the notion of a visible and publicly active Etruscan wife may not simply be the product of Roman imagination. There is a great deal of evidence for the prominence of the couple as an expression of elite Etruscan status in tomb paintings and sarcophagi (Bonfante 1981; Nielsen 1989), even if the attribution of political power to Etruscan women must be approached with caution (Spivey 1991; Briquel 1998). The ancient stereotype of the Etruscan female as more publicly exposed than other Mediterranean women is well-established, making Tanaquil's behavior as much the product of Roman views of Etruscans as their own cultural views on female propriety. As with the previous example of her prophetic skills, while there is a degree of correspondence between Tanaquil's behavior and Etruscan material evidence, it remains difficult to disentangle her from the layers of historical tradition and Roman cultural values.

The two examples above have focused on how Tanaquil's actions and character were constructed within historical narrative and storytelling. An alternative approach to Tanaquil is to focus on the "mundane elements" within her story rather than on the storytelling itself. This argument operates from the hypothesis that the conception and construction of Tanaquil (and other Etruscan "queens") "preserves a pattern of 'queenship' in Rome,

without [necessarily] understanding its true nature” (Glinister 1997: 117). A tangible example of this approach – one that marries these problematic secondary sources with primary archaeological evidence – comes in the observation that Tanaquil and later Tullia, the daughter of Servius Tullius, are associated with the riding of carriages or perhaps chariots either to or within Rome – a right traditionally granted to very few women (and then only matrons) outside of the Vestal Virgins in the historical period of the Roman Republic. More specifically, both Tanaquil and Tullia are connected to the *carpentum*, a four-wheeled vehicle. Taken together with archaeological evidence from burials of wheeled vehicles in Orientalizing period female tombs in Etruria and Latium (Bartoloni and Grottanelli 1989; Rathje 2000), one may ask whether the addition of the *carpentum* in the account of the Etruscan queen preserves a hint of an ephemeral social practice where such a vehicle served as a visual marker of power and status. While acknowledging that such answers are elusive, this approach offers an alternative model for “looking through the veneer applied by successive Roman annalists ... to see archaic queenship for what it is ...” (Glinister 1997: 126).

All of the examples above – Tanaquil’s divinization skills, her prominent involvement in her husband’s public life and her use of the *carpentum* – demonstrate both the limits of Roman literary sources and points of convergence with familiar aspects of Etruscan society. The well-known late-Republican and early-Augustan accounts of Tanaquil surely cannot be treated as an accurate portrait of the behavior of a historical personage. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the Roman lens through which these sources look at Tanaquil, we may also question closely the aspects of her portrayal and memory in the Roman world that are rooted in Etruscan tradition. In fact, a close and careful look at these elements, balanced against primary evidence from the Etruscan world, demonstrates some intriguing resonances between the Roman construction of Tanaquil and her elite Etruscan relatives. While Tanaquil is no doubt an amalgam of many parts, I would argue that Etruscologists can benefit by asking what may have been the original Etruscan components of this elite woman that eventually became part of her Roman version. A particular area of Tanaquil’s behavior that is often overlooked in this respect, because it does not feature prominently in the well-known historical accounts of her, is her role as a producer of ceremonial textiles.

3. Tanaquil and Ceremonial Textiles

If scholars were to rely solely on the famous accounts of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, they would know next to nothing about Tanaquil’s textile skills. A number of antiquarian sources, however, also associate her with the textile crafts of spinning thread and weaving garments for members of her

household at key life stage transitions. Tanaquil's textile production relates, first and foremost, to marriage, and, according to antiquarians such as Varro and Pliny among others, she was viewed as the source for several elements of the Roman wedding ceremony that evoke wool-working. In addition, she is said to be the originator of a number of royal garments and Roman textiles associated with transitional ceremonials, such as the *tunica recta* or *regilla*, which was donned both by brides prior to their wedding and by boys when they put aside the *bulla*, and the *toga praetexta*, signaling their passage from childhood to adulthood. This relationship between Tanaquil and ceremonial textiles is intriguing indeed. Elite Romans considered household textile production among the highest expression of female virtue. Yet, according to these antiquarians, several of the textiles that held the most significance for public and familial ceremonies can be traced back to an Etruscan queen.

Tanaquil is found at the origin of several garments that served as outward markers of male power and status. As discussed above, she was vital to her husband's and later to Servius Tullius's succession to the kingship. Several sources indicate that Tanaquil's role in this regard may have been made even more evident by clothes these men wore in public. For example, Pliny writes that:

Marcus Varro informs us on his own authority that the wool on the distaff and spindle of Tanaquil (also called Gaia Caecilia) was still preserved in the Temple of Sancus and also that in the shrine of Fortuna [was] a pleated royal tunic (*togam regiam undulatam*) made by her, which had been worn by Servius Tullius. Hence arose the practice that maidens on their marriage were accompanied by a decorated distaff and spindle with thread. Tanaquil first wove the *tunica recta* of the kind worn by novices and newly married brides. The *toga undulata* was the first among those in favor. (*Natural History* 8.194; Loeb translation)

This passage directly associates Tanaquil with several garments that played key roles in both public and familial ceremonies: the *toga regia undulata* and also the *tunica recta*. Both garments were important in marking transition and status: while the *toga regia undulata* was reserved for males, the *tunica recta* was donned by both boys and girls before key moments of passage into adulthood.²

The *toga regia undulata* may refer to either the *toga praetexta* or the *trabea*. In the same passage only a few sentences later, Pliny attributes the *toga praetexta* to the Etruscans and suggests that the early kings wore the *trabea*. Both of these were garments put on at ceremonial occasions. The *toga praetexta* was the elite Roman male's youthful garment replaced by the *tunica recta* and *toga virilis* at his passage to adulthood between 14–16 years of age; and the *trabea* was a male robe associated with ritual activity performed by kings and augurs.³ Pliny (*Natural History* 8.196) also says that the same *toga*

regia undulata of Servius Tullius made by Tanaquil and preserved in the Temple of Fortuna (which he says draped the statue of Fortuna herself!) was, in fact, a *toga praetexta*, which allegedly lasted for nearly 560 years – no doubt a testament to its fine craftsmanship or magical properties. While the *toga praetexta* was discarded after coming of age rituals in Imperial Rome, adult males wore them in certain ceremonies (Edmondson 2008) before this time period, as manifested by the example covering Avle Metelis on the famous Etrusco-Roman bronze portrait statue of the “Arringatore.”

The defining characteristic of the *toga praetexta* is its purple woven border. The weaving of a separate border at the edges of a garment is a distinctive feature of Etruscan dress known from countless visual examples (Bonfante 2003: 15). Such a border would have been made of wool and produced through a specialized process known as tablet weaving.⁴ Recent studies have argued that the ceramic spools (or *rocchetti*) that are commonly found in Etruscan archaeological contexts may have been weights specifically used for tablet weaving (Gleba 2008a). Because the spools are found in both tombs as grave goods and sanctuaries as votives, they evoke personal identity and further strengthen the connection between specialized Etruscan textile practices and this particular characteristic of the *toga praetexta*. Some scholars also speculate that the border of the *toga praetexta* may have served a protective function for elite young males (or adult males in ceremonial situations) – a proposition strengthened through its frequent pairing with the freeborn youth’s apotropaic amulet, the *bullā* (Sebesta 1994: 47). Perhaps the protective powers of the Roman *toga praetexta* represent a conflation of traditions recalling Etruscan women’s production of ceremonial garments for males at particular moments of transition, especially when they were at their most vulnerable.

Tanaquil’s role is also implicit in a second type of male ceremonial garment. Her husband, Tarquinius Priscus, is said to have been the first to wear a toga embroidered with gold in a triumph (Pliny *Natural History* 19.57), which we can assume Tanaquil herself produced. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (3.61) also cites a purple toga woven with gold as an Etruscan symbol of power, and the *trabea* (noted in Pliny and discussed above) was a similarly ornate garment in terms of color (although no sources directly associate it with gold).⁵ Etruscan mastery in gold working is certainly well-known, and it is reasonable that their skills included adornment of textiles with gold. Unfortunately, there is precious little evidence for weaving with gold prior to the fourth century BCE in Italy (Gleba 2008b; see further, [Chapter 16](#)). However, a possible example has been unearthed at the Etruscan sanctuary of Poggio Colla in northern Etruria, where two ritual depositions contained remnants of gold wire suitable for textile adornment (Meyers 2013).

The attribution of an Etruscan origin for the triumphator’s *toga picta* is debated, but an image from the fourth-century BCE François Tomb of the seer

Vel Saties has been mentioned as a representation of the garment in an Etruscan context (Bonfante 2003: 53 disagrees, but she does argue for an Etruscan origin of this Roman garb). Larissa Bonfante (2003: 41, 91–93) and Shelley Stone (1994) have argued for the reality of the Etruscan legacy in Roman ceremonial garments, and the examples presented above offer a strong argument that, at least for some Roman antiquarians, Etruscan women, with Tanaquil as their figurehead, were entrusted with the making of clothes by which their husbands and sons marked stages of life and status.

There is even more ample evidence that Romans associated Tanaquil with ceremonial textiles worn by women, most notably, the costume of the Roman bride (La Follette 1994). The Pliny passage cited above explicitly relates Tanaquil's distaff and spindle in the Temple of Sancus and her woven toga for Servius Tullius in the Temple of Fortuna with the Roman practice of brides carrying a distaff and spindle in the wedding ceremony. We have also seen that Tanaquil was associated with the origin of the *toga recta*, which was worn by both males and females. Festus (364.21L) further elaborates that young women wove the *toga recta* themselves on an upright loom the night before their wedding. Tanaquil's presence in Roman wedding practice may also be preserved in the custom of the phrase, *ubi tu Gaius ego Gaia* (Hersch 2010a: 187–190). The name Gaia was said to have originated with Tanaquil and was invoked by a bride as she entered her new home because of her wifely character and wool-working (Plutarch *Roman Questions* 30). Both Valerius Maximus (10.7 *de praenominibus*) and Festus (85L) associate the name Gaia Caecilia with Tanaquil and suggest that the presence of her name in the wedding ceremony arose from her superior skills in wool-working.

The relationship of Tanaquil to the Roman wedding ceremony has been discussed by Karen Hersch (2010b). She notes that the evocation of Tanaquil is more likely symbolic than a reference to the actual practice of wool-working among elite Roman women. She also suggests that by the early Imperial period (and probably the late Republican period), a great deal of textile production took place outside of the home, limiting the need for a woman to be the sole provider of woven garments for her family. Although the Roman term, *lanificium*, is generally used to encompass the entirety of the textile production process, it is noteworthy that the relics of Tanaquil preserved in Roman temples were tools, the distaff and spindle, specifically used for spinning and not weaving. If, in fact, these are intended as symbols, they may reference not a wife's domestic wool-working skills in general, but a specific spinning of thread for the ceremonial garments that marked her transition to wife.

The preservation of Tanaquil's influence in the Roman wedding may also be related to the importance of textile production within her Etruscan heritage. In another intriguing study, Hersch (2009) concludes that the Roman bridal costume purposefully includes elements of both Etruscan and Sabine

traditions as symbols of incorporation and assimilation – the bride to her husband’s family as the Etruscans and Sabines to the Romans. This argument rests on the belief that wool-working expertise was not simply attached to the Etruscan queen in the historical tradition to Romanize her, but that her textile skills and their presence in the Roman wedding through costume, tools and words were recognizable markers of Etruscan ethnicity (see [Chapter 20](#)). This suggests that Etruscan identity and textiles were already linked in the Roman mind at least by the end of the Republic. The association between dress and identity, particularly adornment at moments of transition is well established, and was likely an important aspect in the construction of identity for Etruscan women as well (see [Chapter 19](#)). Once again Roman practice points to an intersection between women, dress, and ceremony with an Etruscan origin.

It is worthwhile at this juncture to return briefly to Livy’s Tanaquil. The above survey of antiquarian evidence demonstrates that, eventually, the Etruscan Tanaquil became a symbol of Roman textile production, but in Livy’s text she does not spin or weave at all. Instead, these tasks are assigned to Lucretia – Livy’s premier exemplum of Roman feminine virtue and domesticity – whose story was well-known. Her husband, Collatinus, was said to be drinking with fellow soldiers, with each praising his own wife. Collatinus then challenged the others to a contest of wives. What better way to see whose was most worthy than to visit them by surprise? The men set off for Collatia, where they found all of the wives (most of them Etruscan women!) drinking and carrying on, save Lucretia, who sat diligently at her loom, engaged in the virtuous activity of weaving. It was her superior virtue that inspired illicit desire in the royal prince, Sextus Tarquinius, who returned to the house alone one night, raping Lucretia and bringing about her ultimate death. Thus, one may ask: why isn’t it Lucretia’s spindle in the temple of Sancus, or why isn’t Lucretia the one credited with the bride’s clothes? I suspect that part of the reason may be the distinction between Lucretia’s ideal Roman domestic virtue seen through the weaving of household textiles in contrast to Tanaquil’s more public role inherent in the spinning of thread for garments specifically for ceremonies and rituals. Ultimately, a fully Romanized Tanaquil, evoked by each new bride by the name Gaia, combined both legendary female textile producers – simultaneously representing the ideal Roman wife, but also preserving the Etruscan legacy of ceremonial textiles as markers of status.

Thus, Tanaquil’s appearance in these Roman antiquarian texts is multifaceted. That there is likely a healthy dose of Roman virtue in Tanaquil’s Etruscan behavior is particularly acute, given that all the written sources for female practices – Roman or Etruscan – come predominantly from elite male writers, and thus represent ideals or perceptions rather than actuality. Nevertheless, the evidence presented here is not limited to a generic association between household textile production and the good wife, but indicates a specific association between Tanaquil and garments for ceremonial or ritual occasions

for family members. A final, brief survey of the primary archaeological evidence for the intersection between elite Etruscan women and the production of ceremonial garments makes a case not only for the worth of these Roman sources for Etruscologists, but also presents an interesting example of how cultural perceptions of the role of women in public and ritual life may change through time. Furthermore, such a survey argues for a great deal more specificity and distinction in the practice of “female” behaviors than scholars have traditionally credited to the public and private varieties of textile production.

4. Elite Etruscan Women and Ceremonial Textiles

The archaeological connection between Etruscan women and textile production is well established. The ceramic tools of textile production, in particular spindle whorls, spools (*rocchetti*), and loom weights found in tombs, have been used to argue for the role of spinning and weaving in shaping identity among early Etruscan women, not only in terms of gender, but also with respect to status and craft specialization (Gleba 2009; Lipkin 2012). The occurrence of these tools in non-funerary contexts, such as houses and sanctuaries, demonstrates that the activities of textile production in ancient Etruria belonged to both the public and private spheres of women’s lives. In a recent reevaluation of ceramic textile tools found in Etruscan sanctuaries, I conclude that such evidence may point to the public importance of elite women as the producers of extravagant garments for family transitions such as weddings and funerals, as well as other ritual ceremonies (Meyers 2013). The archaeological context of these tools in religious settings in Etruria, moreover, varies from ancient Greek examples, where a tradition of weaving sacred garments for presentation to divinities (*peplophoria*) dominated, affirming that ceremonial textile production in Etruria need not be interpreted through the same lens as similar practices elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean.

Visual evidence also documents the importance of weaving and spinning in Etruscan society and provides several depictions of women engaged in the production of significant textiles for extraordinary usage. The most familiar of these are two early images of elite women, cloth, and ceremony from the northern and eastern edges of the Etruscan sphere: a *tintinnabulum* from a cemetery near Bologna (Figure 21.1), created between the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE, and a carved wooden throne from Verucchio (Figure 21.2), produced between 700 and 650 BCE (see additional discussion in Chapter 16). Both John Wild (1970) and Bonfante (2003: 11, 106–107) point out the importance of the north (i.e., Gaul) in the development of later Roman clothing. Thus, the northern edges of Etruria serve as a particularly

important crossroads for this sort of cultural exchange.



Figure 21.1 Bell-shaped *tintinnabulum* with repoussé decoration showing the processing of wool, late seventh – early sixth century BCE. Bronze. From the Arsenale Militare necropolis, Tomb 5 (*Tomba degli Ori*), near Bologna. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

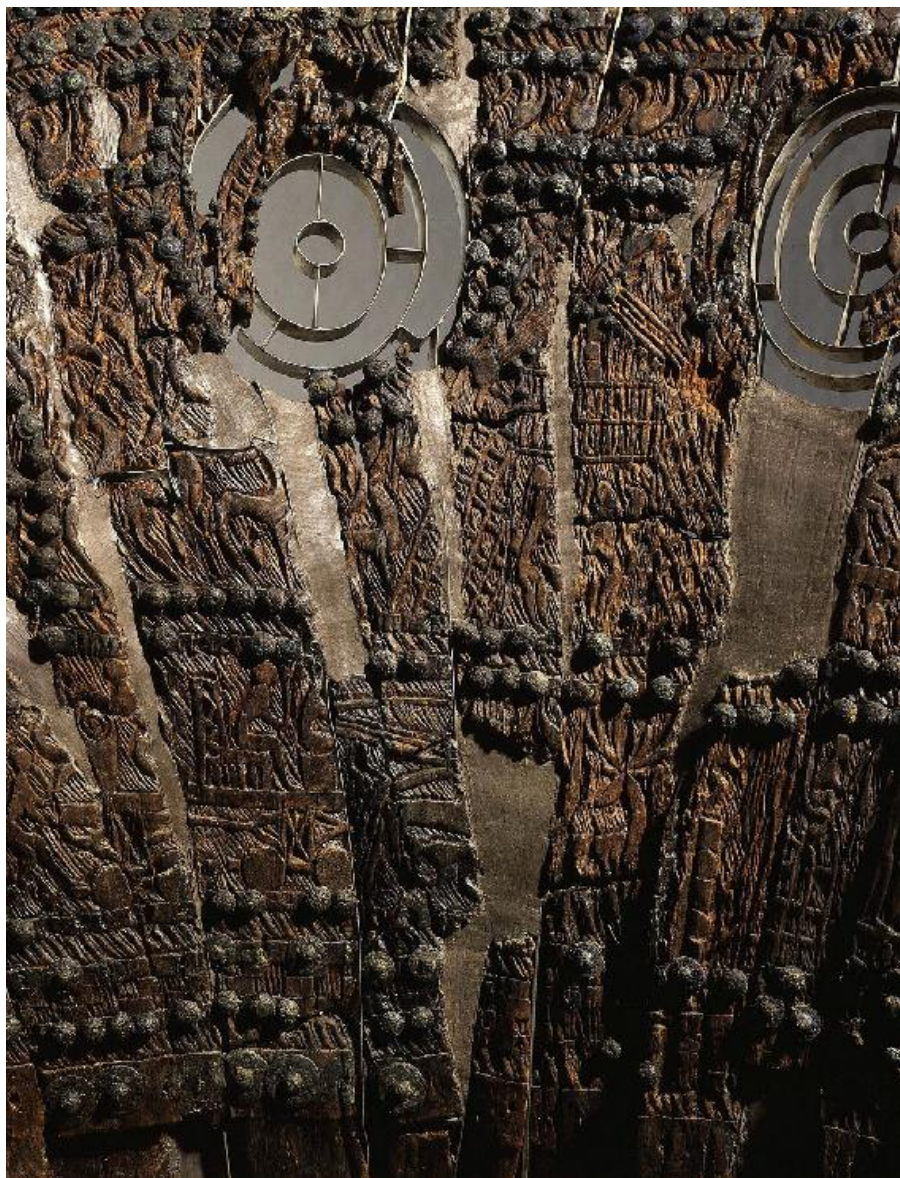


Figure 21.2 Weaving scenes on carved throne, c.700–650 BCE. Wood and bronze. From the Lippi necropolis, Tomb 89, Verucchio. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico.

Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

The embossed and incised images on the bronze *tintinnabulum* from the Arsenale necropolis near Bologna offer scenes of women involved in various stages of spinning and weaving. The object, most likely of a ceremonial function itself, was discovered in a female tomb laden with jewelry and other high-value artifacts. The scenes are among the earliest depictions in Italy of textile production. They are noteworthy in several respects. First, it is clear

that the compositional division of scenes on both sides of the artifact corresponds to the division of stages of textile production: the preparation of raw wool, spinning, the preparation of the loom, and weaving. This emphasizes the specialized process itself, and suggests that the object does not represent the generic act of textile production as shorthand for female virtue. In fact, the attention to detail in the images seems intentionally to preserve distinct elements of the process, which would be recognizable depending on a viewer's familiarity with textile production. A second observation derives from the use of scale and costume in the scene: women in the upper registers are larger than those in the lower register (perhaps differentiating the status of those conducting various stages of textile production), and care is taken to depict details, including borders, on the garments the women are wearing. Such elements of the visual design further distinguish the representation of textile production as non-quotidian.

Carved images on a wooden throne from a man's tomb in Verucchio, located to the northeast of Etruria in the vicinity of the Adriatic coast, similarly contribute to the repertoire of textile production imagery from seventh-century BCE Italy. In this case, not only do scenes represent different phases of production, such as weaving, spinning, perhaps even dyeing, but they also place these activities in a communal setting. Pairs of women work on monumental looms in between domiciles, where standing pairs of women either spin or perhaps dye garments. On a lower register, several figures, including at least one seated individual in a four-wheeled carriage, process to the right. An additional scene includes helmeted male figures standing guard on either side of a representation of sacrifice or slaughter. The monumental looms have been reconstructed as at least two stories high and the adjoining scenes have been interpreted variously, including potential ritual activities (von Eles 2002a).

Both the *tintinnabulum* and the Verucchio throne place women at the center of textile production in seventh century BCE Italy. The depictions do not, however, focus on a single woman alone, dutifully sitting at a loom in a house. Rather, the images are detailed and specific in terms of the production processes, communicating directly to viewers familiar with weaving and spinning. They emphasize elaborate works made on two-story looms, and suggest that such works required communal collaboration. In the case of the Verucchio throne, the proximity of other ceremonial scenes to the weaving images (perhaps even a wedding?) asserts the public contributions of women to their society through their textile skills.

A different type of image of ceremonial cloth – this time from the Archaic period (sixth century BCE) – is found on a series of Chiusine cippi. Here the visual emphasis is on textiles themselves rather than the production process. Several four-sided cippi possess assembly scenes where groups of standing and seated individuals (mostly women) face each other, many of them draped

in elaborate, heavy garments (Figure 21.3). In some cases, a central figure appears to present or drape cloth on other participants in the image. While the interpretation of these scenes is debated, the dominant role of the textiles is obvious. Scholars have suggested both marriage and funerary preparations for these scenes (Bonfante 2003: 198–99; Jannot 2004; van der Meer 2011: 17–18). It is noteworthy that elaborate cloth is also portrayed in other scenes found on the Chiusine cippi, such as prothesis scenes where the deceased (usually a woman) is covered by a textile, or an intriguing example that depicts three figures standing beneath a bordered cloth that some have suggested depicts the marriage ceremony itself (Haynes 2000: 245; van der Meer 2011: 14–17). It is interesting to consider the possibility that with the addition of paint and detailing there may not have been a strict distinction between the appearance of the textiles in these scenes, perhaps suggesting that the same cloth carried special connotations in elite contexts when used in ceremonies of transitional significance, such as weddings and funerals.



Figure 21.3 Cippus base with relief depicting an assembly of women examining pieces of cloth, early fifth BCE. *Pietra fetida*. From Chiusi. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Inv. HIN 81.

Photo: Courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

These are only a few of the many examples of visual evidence for the role of

elite Etruscan women in the production of elaborate textiles. They bring to life not only the process of textile production, but also emphasize the textiles themselves as a product. The art historical record of the Etruscans is filled with images of elaborate Etruscan dress, with richly colored textiles on display in tomb paintings and sarcophagi of all periods (see [Figure 19.2](#)). In fact, they are so ubiquitous that it is easy to take for granted the textiles and the women who would have produced them. Yet these images, in combination with the ample and ever-growing record of textile tools from both funerary and non-funerary contexts, make it plain that textiles, beyond the ordinary garments of a simple household, were a significant public expression of an Etruscan woman's contribution to her society – so much so that such garments in the Roman world were imbued with an Etruscan origin. This assertion surely deepens the significance of Tanaquil's later association with ceremonial textiles in Roman sources. While the historical Tanaquil may be irrecoverable, the Tanaquil that does remain, constructed by Romans and for Romans, preserves just a hint of what it meant to be an elite woman in Etruria.

5. Conclusion

This chapter highlights not only the evidence for Tanaquil and Etruscan women as producers of ceremonial textiles, but also the advantages and disadvantages of using Roman sources to recuperate the Etruscans. We are fortunate to have this glimpse into another culture's understanding and view of this important Italic civilization, yet the sources themselves must be excavated as well, through layers of socially constructed meanings and impressions. Recent theoretical approaches remind us that gender as a category is not as simplistic as defining what is essentially "male" or "female" in ancient evidence. We must ask ourselves about the interaction of a full spectrum of axes of identity in the ancient world – status, power, ethnicity, and gender. Herring and Lomas (2009: 3) state that because male authors already considered women to be "the other," Etruscan women were naturally employed to reinforce broad conceptions of cultural "otherness," which is present on many levels besides gender. We cannot assume, therefore, that Tanaquil's later associations with textile production in Roman sources operate solely on a Roman axis of male and female. Rather, they may derive from the performance of ancient social practice where gender, status, and cultural identity were negotiated simultaneously.

Lastly, this examination of the relationship between Roman and Etruscan primary evidence makes us aware of the dangers in universal assumptions about ancient cultural practices. A nuanced view of textile production and its different meanings through time is only possible through a 360-degree view of the sources: the archaeological evidence informs the literary and the literary

informs the archaeological, although neither source of evidence can fully complete the picture without the other. Etruscans and Romans may very well have considered a woman's contribution through textile production differently: on the one hand typified by Tanaquil's ceremonial garments publicly promoting the elite Etruscan couple, and on the other hand, by Lucretia toiling away in private, thereby honoring her husband through her domestic duties.

The Mesoamerican archaeologist Elizabeth Brumfiel (2006) has warned against unnecessarily constructing continuities between cultural periods by documenting how a type of weaving on a back strap loom was perceived differently in three cultural contexts. She noted that among the Classic Maya this type of weaving defined class; in Aztec Mexico the same type of weaving defined gender, and in twentieth-century Mesoamerica it defined ethnicity. Blumfiel's evocation of shifting meanings across time and culture is particularly apt in this case as an obvious reminder that we should avoid associating textile production with a single conception of gender or status. Hundreds of years separate Tanaquil from the Roman authors who recorded narratives about her life, and she is even further removed from contemporary Etruscologists who are burdened by other biases from years of scholarship in this area. Nevertheless, through careful and mindful scrutiny of the broad context of this evidence, in concert with the primary archaeological record, Tanaquil helps us frame new questions about the identity and activity of elite Etruscan women.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

While no monograph on Tanaquil herself is available, early work by Heurgon 1964 and Martin 1985 set the stage for her incorporation into discussions of Etruscan women. More recently, Amann 2000 (especially 190–194) has offered a full consideration of the "Tanaquil figure," and Hersch 2009 and 2010b has provided interesting and valuable insights into her role in the Roman wedding. The bibliography on Etruscan women is vast, but for representative discussions that ground the state of research in the field, see Rallo 1989, Spivey 1991, Bonfante 1994, Nielsen 1998, and Izzet 2012. Bonfante 2003 and Gleba 2008a are fundamental for any study of Etruscan dress or textile production, while Meyers 2013 explores the archaeological evidence for ceremonial textile production in Etruria.

NOTES

- 1 The date of Livy's work is usually assigned to the penultimate decade of the first century BCE. There are some aspects of his first book, however, which some consider to have been affected by revisions, including sections dealing with Tanaquil; see Bauman 1994.
- 2 The *tunica recta* was put on by boys the night before they exchanged the *toga praetexta* for the *toga virilis*, and girls slept in it the night before their wedding. See Dolansky 2008: 50, 63 n.18.
- 3 See Livy (*History of Rome* 1.41.6), who associates the *trabea* specifically with both Tanaquil and Servius, when she urges him to wear it in the days after Tarquinius's death as a sign of his selection as successor. See also Vergil *Aeneid* 7.188 and Ovid *Fasti* 2.503.
- 4 Tablet weaving is attested well into the Iron Age. It is a specialized process used for the production of narrow textiles such as borders. It utilizes evenly-spaced wooden tablets to facilitate the passage of the weft threads through the warp. Experimental work has shown that the spools found in many ancient contexts may have served as small weights to stabilize the warp threads during the weaving process. See further, Raeder Knudsen 2002.
- 5 Dewar (2008: 217–220) discusses the relationship between the *toga picta* and the *trabea* and asserts that by the fourth century CE the two terms were essentially interchangeable. Both were considered consular robes and at different times associated with the kings, triumphators, and, eventually, the emperor.

CHAPTER 22

The *Obesus Etruscus* Can the Trope be True?

Jean MacIntosh Turfa

1. Introduction

The Etruscans have been history's underdogs for centuries, their reputation having suffered from the material success and affluence they had enjoyed at least since the Iron Age (see [Chapter 20](#)). Roman poets, respectable (Virgil) and otherwise (Catullus), seem to have casually labeled them as self-indulgent and overweight, and subsequent scholars and others have perpetrated this view at the expense of more reasoned analyses. Understanding the phenomenon of the *obesus etruscus* now requires a multidisciplinary approach. The literary comments must be analyzed objectively, with scholars applying a critical eye to the sources, while artistic representations, especially funerary portraiture, must be studied for visual clues. At the same time, we must look to archaeology, which occasionally provides us with potential means of discerning human conditions through physical studies of skeletal materials, and through circumstantial evidence for health and nutrition in early Etruria. In this chapter, I consider the extant categories of potential evidence for Etruscan obesity and related health conditions by focusing on anthropological data from burials, funerary and votive portraiture, and epigraphic statements on the identity of affluent Etruscans. While certain Etruscan noblemen and women probably were corpulent, the phenomenon more likely represents an artifact of the materials and techniques of Etruscan sculptors and coroplasts.

2. The Literary Trope

Did the Romans actually believe that, more than other groups, their Etruscan neighbors and in-laws were predisposed to obesity? In linking adjectives for “overweight” with “Etruscan,” the poets certainly expected that their audiences would understand what they meant. Yet, in using the term *etruscus*, they had already taken a step back from a realistic, personal encounter, for this is a Latin ethnic term, and probably pejorative or dismissive, since it is not the term that Etruscans used for themselves, namely “*Rasenna*.”

The Augustan-era literary references to the *obesus* or *pinguis etruscus* are two: Catullus's 39th *Ode* and Virgil's *Second Georgic*. In *Carmen* 39.11, Catullus (c.84–54 BCE) refers to the “Umbrian” and “fat Etruscan” when satirizing a Roman man's social behavior:

*Si urbanus esses aut Sabinus aut Tiburs
aut pinguis Vmber aut obesus Etruscus
aut Lanuvinus ater atque dentatus
aut Transpadanus, ut meos quoque attingam,
aut quilubet, qui puriter lavit dentes,
tamen renidere usque quaque te nollem:
nam risu inepto res ineptior nulla est.*

Even if you were a refined person or a Sabine, or a man from Tivoli, or a portly Umbrian or a fat Etruscan, or a swarthy or toothy Lanuvian or a man from beyond the Po, to touch upon my own people, or whoever you like, who cleans his teeth with pure water, I still don't want you to be grinning all the time: because nothing is dopier than a silly smile (translation J. M. Turfa).

Catullus had to know when he wrote this that his audience would readily understand the ethnic stereotypes; the other term he uses is *pinguis*, for the fat or portly Umbrian. The term could mean sleek, well-fed, or prosperous for a man, and was also used in reference to foodstuffs to indicate “greasy” or “rich in fat” (in a good sense). Applied to wine, it meant “full-bodied,” a desirable condition.

While the most influential modern commentaries (e.g., Thomson 1997: 306–307) are silent on the issue, several older authorities did weigh in on the *obesus etruscus*. Mommsen (1900: 150 (vol. I chap. 9)), for example, noted that “Instead of the slender and symmetrical proportions of the Greeks and Italians the sculptures of the Etruscans exhibit only short sturdy figures with large heads and thick arms,” while R. Ellis (1889: 141) observed, “Their fatness was connected with their luxurious living” (*Aeneid* 11.737–40, Diodorus Siculus 5.40). Fordyce (1961: 186–187) believed that the “*Obesus etruscus* accords with Virgil's *pinguis Tyrrhenus* (*Georgics* 2.193) and with representations of Etruscans in art,” while E. T. Merrill (1976: 70) suggested the following: “*Obesus*: the monuments of the Etruscans show them to have been a short and thick-set people.” It is also important to note that while the manuscripts all use *parcus*, “thrifty,” for the Umbrian, most commentators substitute *pinguis*, “sleek, greasy.”

With very different intentions, the poet Virgil (70–19 BCE), in his pastoral *Second Georgic* (2.193), used the term *pinguis* to portray a lush setting for an Etruscan religious ceremony: “The sleek Etruscan at the altars blows on his ivory flute and on the curved platters we place the steaming entrails [of a

sacrificial victim]” (*Inflavit cum pinguis ebur Tyrrhenus ad aras lancibus et pandis fumantia reddimus exta*). The Augustan poet sought to depict the abundance of the land of Italy and its ancient exploitation by exotic native peoples, the Etruscans; the healthful and supportive character of the soil is emphasized in the good omens produced by the victim’s entrails. Of course Roman authors, even the skeptical Cicero, credited the expertise of Etruscan priests in matters of ritual and divination, so the overall connotation of these lines is surely positive (Livy *History of Rome* 5.1.6: *gens itaque ante omnes alias eo magis dedita religionibus quod excelleret arte colendi eas*; see also [Chapters 12](#) and [18](#)). Later in the same poem, Virgil applies *pinguis* to the *nigra terra*, the fertile “black earth,” again using it in an approving mode. As an issue of general knowledge, the identification of Etruria’s volcanic soil as rich and fertile would have been a commonplace, known to Greeks as well as Italians (see Strabo Book 5; Diodorus Siculus 5.40; cf. Barker and Rasmussen 1998: 25–42). Of course, the soils of Campania and other regions were also volcanic and extremely fertile.

These terms were also known in medical circles, at least by the time of Celsus (fl. 14–37 CE) who wrote books on both medicine and agriculture (although the latter do not survive). He juxtaposed the condition of *obesus* with that of *gracilis*, “slim, thin” to mean “fat, stout or plump;” *obesus* could also modify soil that was “enriched” or, in other words, fertilized (see Glare 1996: 1212; on issues of how to define obesity/being overweight for antiquity, see Bradley 2011: 6–11). With hindsight honed by Judeo-Christian heritage, *we* may read a value judgment in the charge of obesity: since much of the ancient world was constantly on the brink of want if not starvation, over-indulgence could be interpreted as disdain or outright flaunting of one’s good fortune. Garnsey (1999: 34–61), in fact, maintains that many or most people in Classical antiquity were malnourished, even if they did not go hungry (for a modern comparison, see Dirks 1993 and Bradley 2011: 6). But these comments on obesity do not come up in contexts like that of Juvenal’s Roman example (*Satires* 1.92) of *simplex furor*, who loses hundreds gambling and yet will not give a cast-off cloak to a shivering slave. So there is no particular moral or ethical overtone inherent in the poets’ remarks. (Much more scurrilous is the description of Etruscan women as “big drinkers” who recline with men other than their husbands: Theopompus cited by Athenaeus *Deipnosophistai* 12.517–18; see also [Chapter 21](#)).

While Etruria’s wealth, both of the land and from seaborne commerce, was well established as early as the Iron Age (eighth century and earlier), the surviving literary references to Etruscan prosperity or to obesity only seem to begin much later, as does the presumed artistic evidence. The Greek geographers/historians, Strabo and Diodorus, like Catullus and Virgil, only span the later first century BCE into the Augustan period. In contrast, the portraits that are today linked with the *obesus etruscus* were made – and

surely buried – from the end of the fourth to the mid-second century BCE and thus were out of sight when the poets had their say. What, then, would have generated the stereotype of the “fat Etruscan” in the minds of Late Republican/Principate-era Romans? Could they have referred to actual persons of their acquaintance, or to artistic representations, which may have been open to misunderstanding in interpretation? Did enough Romans see or hear of cramped Etruscan Hellenistic family tombs and the effigy-sarcophagi that had been deposited there since the later fourth century? Or was there a lost category of Etruscan public or civic sculpture that portrayed Etruscan statesmen and heroes fat-and-all, as Republican portraits depicted Romans warts-and-all?

3. Perpetrating the Slur: The Link to Artistic Representations

Scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seized upon a trope that was familiar from school readings in the Classics and applied it to the few monuments of Etruscan art, mainly sarcophagi and urns, that were known until fairly recently (for discussion of values and attitudes of Classical art with regard to physical condition, see Bradley 2011: especially 25–26 with notes 72–73 for scholarship on Etruscan art). In his Victorian work, *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, George Dennis made the association between the “obese Etruscan” and the effigies he saw on Hellenistic sarcophagi while traveling in the region of Tuscania:

One of these *nenfro* sarcophagi is among the finest I have seen executed in this coarse material. On the lid lies a man of middle age, a true *obesus Etruscus – turgidus epulis* – with ‘fair round belly with good capon lined,’ reclining, half-draped, on the festive couch. His face, as usual with these sepulchral effigies, has so much individuality of character, that none can doubt its being a portrait. A striking face it is, too – with commanding brow, large aquiline nose, mouth speaking intelligence and decision, though somewhat sensual withal, and an air of dignity about the whole countenance, marking him as an aristocrat – one of the *Patres Conscripti* of Tuscania. No inscription sets forth his name, pedigree or age.¹

The Tuscania sarcophagi seen by Dennis in museum courtyards or dealers’ lots have many counterparts in the region of Tarquinia–Tuscania and its rock-cut tombs. For instance, a younger man’s effigy from one of the Alethna family tombs at Musarna, now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum (Figure 22.1), is carved in *nenfro* and depicts the deceased reclining as if at a dinner party. His formal attire, fashionable in Hellenistic Etruria, is the Greek himation, a hip-mantle wrapped over his lower body and one shoulder that

exposes his chest and abdomen.² Voids in the volcanic stone that today emphasize the area of his navel are actually the result of erosion, not the work of the ancient sculptor. Nevertheless, style and technique of carving have been constrained by the medium: fine details cannot be worked in such coarse stone, so the deceased's facial features are fairly simplified and smooth, his wreath is a convex torus (perhaps intended to be completed by plaster and/or paint since traces of red or red-over-white adhere to some sarcophagi), and the folds of his drapery are not crisp or pleated. His body is also made softer and thicker through the exigencies of the material, with hands and feet slightly larger than normal, and his chest and abdomen looking soft and sagging. At first glance, this man might appear overweight, but when examined from all angles, his belly does not really bulge outward and the rest of his body is not swollen with rolls of extra fat. An artisan concerned with not wanting to ruin his block of stone would likely have exercised caution in carving such a figure, and thus might make it, as this example suggests, less gracile than its subject was in real-life. Interestingly, this sarcophagus is not one of the earliest examples of its type, but probably belonged to the second or third generation of the family to have commissioned such a monument. The first patrons of the realistic effigies often had sarcophagi of finer stones such as alabaster and limestone; they were also depicted with more precisely defined bodies, even if those bodies were overweight. Women in the family were rendered more simply but their bodies are not thickened like those of the men, although the stone is left in a pillar behind their heads and necks, thinly disguised as a veil, as seen, for instance, in women's *nenfro* sarcophagi in Tarquinia and London (Herbig 1952: nos. 106 and 68, pls. 106a, e). Such pillar-effects are known in the sculpture of many cultures (e.g., Old Kingdom Egypt) as a means of strengthening freestanding statues.



Figure 22.1 Sarcophagus and lid with a reclining effigy of a clean-shaven man, third century BCE. *Nenfro*. From the Alethna family tomb, Civita Musarna. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum, inv. MS 3488A.

Another issue that affects our interpretation is the question of ancient attitudes on the depiction of undesirable or suboptimal physical conditions: such things as deformities, blemishes, or visible evidence of disease rarely appear in art – and this must have contrasted to real life, even among the affluent, the only portions of society distinguished by funerary portraits (for background on Etruscan portraiture, see Carpino 2013). There seems to have been a reluctance to imitate pathological conditions or imperfections in Classical representational art in general, even in medically-occasioned sculpture, such as the anatomical votive models offered at many central Italian sanctuaries (Etruscan and Italic) from the third to first centuries BCE. Children and babies, presumably created as thank-offerings for the health or birth of a child, may be shown with chubby cheeks or plump bodies, but these are indications of good health and well-being, not obesity (see Turfa 2005: 244–246, nos. 270, 273 for a little boy’s head-bust collected in Italy in the nineteenth century, University of Pennsylvania Museum inv. no. MS 1844, fig. 2).

Anatomical Votive Models

In anatomical votive models, offered in the thousands at Etruscan and Italic sanctuaries (see further, [Chapter 18](#)), only a handful of possible pathological conditions are depicted, and most of these are not especially dramatic (if indeed they are pathology and not just poor or exposed modeling technique): a head with some hair loss, a bandaged leg, a knee with bumpy lesions (Turfa 2004: 361–363; Recke 2013). Feet with bunions are better represented (Turfa 2005: 246–247 no. 274), and probably reflect the frequent wearing of bad shoes, but cannot be seen as evidence of obesity. Fashionable yet dangerous footwear, like the platform-soled, hinged “*tyrrhenika*,” were attributed to Etruscans (Turfa 2005: 32; Touloupa 1973), but the model feet with simple bunions are so common that they may have been considered normal. Statues, clothed or otherwise, were offered at several central Italian healing cults such as Etruscan Pyrgi, Tarquinia (Graviscae and Ara della Regina), and Veii (Campetti and Pendici Piazza d’Armi); and Latin / Italic Lavinium, Fregellae, Gabii, Nemi, Calvi and Rome (Tiber deposit) (for lists and references, see Turfa 2004). They may not be models with aesthetically correct proportions, especially as the terracotta had to be self-supporting; nevertheless, none depict obesity.

One pair of nude figures, a woman and a beardless youth from third-century Capua (now lost), depict slightly dumpy bodies, but in terracotta sculpture, this was probably a technique for achieving balance so that the statues could stand alone.³ Their musculature is poorly defined, and their abdomens protrude very slightly, but their legs are slim and their toes face forward in a

healthy stance. The woman's head was drawn from a mold for a veiled male head, but was retouched with a wreath or braid added to hide the rough edges. Some of the dumpy effect of their lower torsos may surely be attributed to the need for stability, so that the artisan fixed their centers of gravity lower down. There is no evidence of obesity or the assumption that obesity was pathological.

In theory, the stance, if not the proportions, of statues could offer circumstantial evidence of obesity-related conditions: individuals who are 50 pounds or more overweight are likely to develop Type 2 diabetes and its attendant orthopedic problems such as a stance with flat feet splayed to the sides. Yet, apart from cases in terracotta where the statue needs to support itself, we do not see such postures in extant sculptures (see also [Chapter 25](#)).⁴ Various types of stiffness of the hands and other problems with joints might have been depicted, if they were present in a fair proportion of the population, but we do not see these either (for medical details, etc., see Turfa forthcoming).

The top of the line for votive statues must have been specially commissioned and sensitive terracotta portraits, either busts or full statues, of men and women, like the well-known "Testa Malavolta" from Veii's Portonaccio deposit (Torelli 2000: 622 no. 280; Brendel 1995: 320, fig. 241). Females are rarely portrayed as aged or wrinkled; a few men are distinguished with the marks of maturity, experience, or responsibility. A fine portrait from the Caeretan Manganello deposit shows a man with short, thinning hair and lean, lined face drawn slightly to one side. This has caused some scholars to diagnose the asymmetrical paralysis that follows a stroke, although this is by no means proven (Torelli 2000: 631 no. 306). At Tarquinia, a mature male head was mold-made but hand-finished with a receding hairline, crow's feet and deep lines framing his mouth: he cannot be considered obese, only aging (Comella 1982: pl. 8B no. B₁IV).

Civic or public portraits of statesmen or heroes could have relied on realism/naturalism, but little evidence of these remains, for public monuments would have been cast in bronze and thus were targets for plundering and re-use of the metal. Statues such as the so-called "Brutus," a mature male head probably from an equestrian statue of c.300 BCE, or the "Arringatore," the orator Avle Metelis (c.100 BCE), likely represent this genre and do so realistically (Brendel 1995: 399–401 figs. 308A, B; 430–431 figs. 328–329). Both men show signs of aging and experience in drawn, lined faces and thinning hair, but neither is at all overweight.

In funerary portraits there is a certain sexual dimorphism: women are seldom depicted as aging or heavy, apart from Venus lines on their throats; fewer than ten, probably all from one workshop (in Tuscania), are shown with plump happy faces and laugh-lines denoting aging (see below). In funerary imagery, children usually are depicted as small-scale adults, dressed and posed like

bejeweled matrons or mature men reclining in hip-mantles as in adult sarcophagi. One small Volterranean urn of the extended Caecina family is inscribed (in Latin) with the name and age of the deceased, A. Caecina Selcia, who died when he was 12 (Volterra, Museo Guarnacci, inv. no. 227; Cristofani et al. 1975: 28–29 no. 9). His face is wan and emaciated, exposing the contours of his skull, as if he had died of a wasting disease and was naturalistically depicted, yet the skull seems like that of an adult, so we cannot be sure if the rendition of illness was intentional. We are far from being able to evaluate the naturalism of such portraits in clay and stone, as the sample combining image and skeleton, or even image and epitaph, is statistically very low.

Evidence on Health, Human Remains and Related Sources

We ought to be able to evaluate general health and nutrition, and thus perhaps cases of obesity in Etruria, from examination of buried bodies/skeletons, for various conditions may be manifested in the bones of the obese (on skeletal evidence, see further, [Chapter 13](#)). Most remains are not well enough preserved to retain such evidence, but some recent studies have shown how much may be learnt from the analysis of a good sample – for instance, the bones retained in the terracotta sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa of Chiusi in the British Museum (see Swaddling and Prag 2002). The studies generated by this find have supported an evaluation of the realism of funerary portraits, with most of the researchers concluding that the clay effigy on the lid of Seianti's sarcophagus was indeed modeled from life – although it did not depict her at her final age-at-death. Nor did the portrait head show in any way the serious asymmetry and postural changes that must have been evident to those around her, as recognized in old injuries visible on her bones: severe trauma to her hip and leg and resultant temporomandibular joint deformation and poor dental health (Lilley 2002; Neave and Prag 2002; Prag 2002; Stoddart 2002). But her collarbone was typed as gracile, indicating a characteristic that cannot be associated with the skeleton of an obese woman.

A small number of obesity-related conditions are manifested in the skeleton, for instance, DISH: Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hypertrophy (Forestier's disease). In certain regions of the skeleton (especially the axial skeleton), tendons and ligaments ossify excessively, and thus may be preserved in archaeological contexts. Thoracic vertebrae often show an asymmetrical growth that resembles dripped candle-wax, particularly along the right side of the spine. Studies of medieval and modern populations seem to show a higher incidence among males and among the diabetic and/or obese, for instance, well-fed medieval monks (Jankauskas and Urbanavičius 2008). Estelle Lazer

(2009: 201–203) identified two presumed cases of DISH among the dead of Pompeii in 79 CE – but these were female skeletons, and Roman, not Etruscan. The correlation with obesity is not universally acknowledged, but some modern studies recognized obesity in both men and women, some as young as 25 years of age (Mata et al. 1997; Kiss et al. 2002). The ossification of tissue other than bone enabled some scholars to detect the condition in perhaps five victims at Herculaneum.⁵ Again, though, while the finds may establish the presence of this condition in Italy in antiquity, none of the individuals was Etruscan, by locale or date.

Hyperostosis frontalis interna is another weight-related condition, usually affecting post-menopausal women and involving deformation of the inner surface of the skull. It has been detected in numerous women among the victims of Vesuvius, and Lazer (2007: 610) noted that Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 4.16, 4.20) described both the Elder Pliny and his sister, the author's mother, as overweight. But again, these cases are Roman, not Etruscan.

A survey (Turfa Forthcoming, section 10) of extant Etruscan epitaphs, most of which belong to the fourth century and Hellenistic period (e.g., the time of the funerary portraits in stone and clay) offers a potential index for longevity in this period of Etruscan history. Over 4400 funerary inscriptions have been published, and of these, at least 254, almost entirely from the regions of Tarquinia and Volterra, provide the age of the deceased. Of the inscriptions with a complete age preserved, the mortality rate seems comparable to most other populations, with a number of individuals reaching their 70s and 80s, one woman of 90, and two men of 100 and 106 (*ET* Ta 1.107).⁶ This mortality profile does not appear to reflect the shortened lifespan that ill health such as morbid obesity would cause in a substantial number of adults.

Another potential element of circumstantial evidence is found in the Etruscan *Brontosopic Calendar*, now extant in a Byzantine Greek translation, itself derived from the Latin translation of Nigidius Figulus, a friend of Cicero. The Etruscan original is lost but may have developed from an Iron Age or Archaic divination text (see Turfa 2012: 182). An omen of thunder heard on the 29th of December predicts “If it thunders, it signifies the most healthful leanness for bodies.” While the text is full of predictions of diseases, famine, or abundance of provisions for Etruria, this omen evinces a different viewpoint. Surely if an Etruscan document presents leanness as healthful then obesity cannot have been viewed as desirable or even commonplace. The *Brontosopic Calendar* was circulated in the intellectual milieu of first-century/Late Republican Rome. Even earlier (fourth to third centuries), a class of bronze votive figurines was being dedicated in sanctuaries across central Italy. The figures, which have inspired artists like Giacometti and Modigliani (see also [Chapter 24](#) and [Figure 24.5](#)), have extremely elongated bodies, sometimes with quite natural heads, hands and feet: they are not meant to look emaciated, but may have been intended to depict “healthful leanness.” The

tradition began with bronzes of the sixth–fifth centuries offered at the Fonte Veneziana shrine at Arezzo, and continued with some now-famous pieces in the sanctuary of Diana at Nemi: they depict haruspices, men, women and youths, as well as gods and goddesses (see Terrosi Zanco 1961; Cristofani 1985: 172–173, 178–180, 273–276, and other references at Turfa 2012: 182). Most people in the ancient Mediterranean (and especially warriors, farmers, travelers, and sailors) would have been leaner and more buff than most modern counterparts simply because of the exigencies of ancient work and transport.

Funerary Portraiture and Realism/Naturalism

Painted funerary portraiture of the late fourth century BCE does include some special examples of realistic details of figure or physiognomy (see also [Chapter 17](#)). In the François Tomb at Vulci, the somewhat mediocre artist renders Vel Saties with individual physiognomy and drawn face, wearing the robe of a *triumphator*; he is accompanied by Arnza (“Little Arnth”), a rachitic dwarf who kneels to release a bird for augury. Arnza’s body is obscured by a purple-banded tunic, but his head has heavy cheeks and double chin (Andreae 2004: 56 fig. 42; Steingraber 1985: pl. 185). In the Tarquinian necropolis, the Tomb of the Shields has a fresco depicting the grandfather of the family, Velthur Velcha, with gray hair and grizzled beard, enthroned in the Underworld; the hip-mantle he wears emphasizes his corpulence (Steingraber 1985: pl. 45). His son, Larth, founder of the tomb, and a second image of Velthur himself reclining opposite Larth at a banquet both show distinctive aquiline noses and well-defined torsos. Both Velthur’s wife, Ravnthu Aprthnai, and his daughter-in-law, Veilia Seitithi, look young and pretty – while ancestor Velthur has aged before proceeding to a throne, in neither of her portraits has Ravnthu lost her looks! (From this one might deduce that the portraits were painted during the lifetime of the sitters...) In some ways the graphic arts permit greater rendering of details, and similar physiognomies may be found in contemporary vase-painting and engraved mirrors: different conditions applied to sculpture, however.

Style and Technique of Funerary Sculpture

It seems that the only deliberate representations of obese Etruscans are the funerary statues of mature men on the lids of sarcophagi and urns of the later fourth century and Hellenistic period. The three main sources of funerary portraiture are the stone sarcophagi, mainly from the region of Tarquinia, terracotta sarcophagi known from Tarquinia, Tuscania and its environs, and (in small numbers) Chiusi, Volterranean urns in alabaster and tufa (with a few

stone urns from the Chiusine region), and to a lesser extent, the Chiusine mold-made terracotta urns. The last, being smaller in scale and mass-produced, offer less distinct detail and usually have simplified effigies that are sometimes even difficult to type as to gender. Of approximately 800 effigies on the lids of sarcophagi and urns (nearly all of them of the fourth to first centuries BCE), roughly 470 are male and well enough preserved to allow a judgment on their appearance.⁷ Determining obesity is imprecise because of the characteristics of their different media, especially when coarse stones like *nenfro* were used; many also reflect the degree of technical expertise or haste of their sculptors. I found only about 80 examples, all male, that might be said to appear overweight or obese, with a round/convex belly, rolls of fat, or distinctly thick or soft body: all wear the hip-mantle, which tends to draw attention to the abdomen. Many of the figures came from a small number of workshops or hands, for instance, five men in the Curunas family tomb (Moretti and Moretti Sgubini 1983: pls. 11–16, 19–20, 97–99) bear a distinct resemblance, not in personal features, but in the style and technique of their carving, which argues against the deliberate portrayal of individual features like corpulence. The Curunas sarcophagi came from the same workshop, and were carved for three generations spanning the years 310–270 BCE.

As implied in the representation of Seianti in the British Museum, it would seem that Etruscan artists, or the aristocratic families commissioning funerary portraits, did not have a strong commitment to realism or naturalism in rendering all details true to life. Thus the centenarian Larth Cales, buried in the Vipinana family tomb at Tuscania (Herbig 1952: no. 86 pls. 83a, 84a; *ET AT* 1.64), was laid to rest beneath an effigy of a decades-younger man, while a number of children were buried in sarcophagi depicting adult figures. (For instance, two little girls, ages 7 and 8, both named Thana, in Tomb II of the Alethna family of Musarna, had small-scale sarcophagi that were carved with maternally, draped effigies like mature women (Herbig 1952: 204; Viterbo, Museo Nazionale Etrusco inv. nos. 259 and 213a; *ET AT* 1.110 and 1.113).

The terracotta sarcophagi (slightly fewer than 200 have been catalogued by Gentili 1994) of Chiusi, Tarquinia and its hinterland, allow for a certain degree of individuality, with deliberate modeling of wrinkles, as in the sympathetically portrayed heads of two older women with laugh-lines, one found in the Tomb of the Treptie at Tuscania (Gentili 1994: 45 no. A 26, pl. 8, dated to the end of the third century BCE) and the other, surely from the same workshop, a head obtained in Rome in the nineteenth century and now in the University Museum in Philadelphia (inv. MS 5690) ([Figure 22.2](#)). A third naturalistic rendering is a frowning older woman with wrinkles on a lid from Tuscania preserved in the Basel Antikenmuseum (Gentili 1994: 75–76 no. B 72, pl. 33, last quarter of the third century BCE). These are the only female images in this medium that depart from an idealized, youthful female appearance. A rare Volterranean urn depicting a married couple also shows an

older woman whose lines and wrinkles mirror those of her spouse. This was clearly a special commission, as implied even by its medium – terracotta rather than the usual alabaster (Haynes 2000: 368 fig. 290; Prag 2002: 66 fig. 3, second century BCE; neither spouse is obese, however).



Figure 22.2 Head of an older woman, third century BCE. Terracotta. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum, inv. MS 5690.

Photo: Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum, image # 96699.

Of male effigies among the terracotta lids, fewer than ten, really only three or four, may be said to show deliberate modeling of heavy bodies with protruding bellies or flabby chests, but the heads, made in standard molds, are generic, slim youthful males, as can be seen in two examples from Tuscania, and one in the Musée du Louvre, dated to the middle of the third century BCE (Gentili 1994: 76–78 nos. B 73, B 76 and B 77, pls. 34–35). Just three other men show wrinkled or lined faces that differentiate them from stock types of molded head (Gentili 1994: 48–52 nos. A 33, A 39, A 42, pls. 14, 18, 21), but their bodies are unremarkable; they are all from the Tomb of the Treptie at

Tuscania, and, like the wrinkled ladies, clearly the work of a single artist or atelier.

The technique of terracotta manufacture seems to have produced, instead, a high proportion of *thin* effigies, with rather flat bodies, even when their separately-molded heads look robust and healthy: it must have been much quicker and safer to make and fire such shallow figures, as, for instance, a young man's effigy from Tuscania now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek ([Figure 22.3](#)) (inv. no. HIN 78, Nielsen 1996: 74 no. 24; Gentili 1994: 95 no. B119, pl. 56). In fact, most of the effigies, both male and female, in the terracotta sarcophagi found in the Tomb of the Treptie show this flattened, linear effect, with a few drapery folds rising sharply above the barely convex surface of the body (see Gentili 1994: 43–52 nos. A27–A42, pls. 9–21). Figures like these should be balanced against the stone *obesus*-types where thicker limbs would be less prone to damage during carving: their bodies, in both cases, are constrained by artistic style and technique, and not likely to be a conscious replication of the portrait-subject's actual physical condition.



Figure 22.3 Sarcophagus lid with the reclining effigy of a young man, third century BCE. Terracotta. From Tuscania. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Inv. HIN 78.

Photo: by Ole Haupt/Courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Tuscania and its environs is also the locale for many of the stone sarcophagi of the artistic orbit of Tarquinia. Among the stone-carved effigies, a few dozen are either outright obese or so summarily carved that their torsos lack definition and appear flabby. Among the definitely obese is a man in the Tarquinia Museo Nazionale (Herbig 1952: no. 110, pl. 84) with a flabby chest, rounded rolls of fat over his abdomen, and a thick, heavy neck. The famous Lars Puleas was carefully carved, so we must accept the realism of his flaccid ribcage and heavy face (Torelli 2000: 481; Ta 1.17); the same goes for

another man in the Tarquinia Museum who has a simpler, rounded belly (Herbig 1952: no. 112, pl. 70b). A special commission from the Monterozzi necropolis is a man with cultic associations: a fawn drinks from the phiale in the effigy's hand (Herbig 1952: no. 119, pl. 27). His head is older and balding, and his imperfectly articulated body has a round belly, emphasized by his hip-mantle. The appearance of a balding man with protruding belly on an alabaster lid from Chiusi now in the Museo Archeologico in Florence prompted Herbig to associate him with the *pinguis / obesus* poems (Herbig 1952: nos. 21–22 no. 21, pl. 60).

A few special commissions of the “first generation” of the Hellenistic stone sarcophagi and urns certainly illustrate corpulent, mature men who, presumably, would have been typed as an *obesus etruscus* by their Latin-speaking in-laws (although this would have occurred as much as two centuries *before* Catullus and Virgil). The best known is the so-called “Magnate,” Velthur Partunu, carved at the end of the fourth century BCE (see M. Cataldi's entry in Boitani 1988: 9 no. 2; Brendel 1995: 390 fig. 391, there dated mid-third century BCE). His bored pose with head on hand, finely carved drapery (the breccia medium allows crisper folds), shaggy hair, lined face and jowls, serve to emphasize the smooth, convex expanse of his sagging chest and rotund abdomen. His aquiline nose and the set of his jaw (as of one who has lost teeth) further contribute to a unique portrait. There is one catch, however: while the portrait depicts a mature, even aging man, this is no 82-year-old – and yet that is the age recorded in his epitaph on the sarcophagus (*ET Ta* 1.9).

The later fourth and early third centuries BCE saw the creation by skilled artists of masterpieces in stone for funerary use, obviously the result of specially-described commissions from noble families: examples include the two Boston sarcophagi of the Tetnie family of Vulci, depicting married couples in bed, and the Tarquinia sarcophagus depicting Laris Partunu as a Punic priest (Haynes 2000: 288–290 figs. 232a–b, 233; 291 fig. 234a). The large-scale urn of Arnth Velimna / Volumnius of Perugia supported by Vanth figures (his effigy on the lid slim but with a lined, jowled face) shows that the occasional later artist could work to this standard (Haynes 2000: 381 fig. 297). The first generation of the genre seems to show greater attention to detail and to the aesthetics of composition – enhanced by the use, in many cases, of finer-textured stones. This makes us assume these are true-to-life (if not veristic) portraits, like that of the 33 year-old Sethre Vipinans of Tuscania (Herbig 1952: 38–39 no. 69, pls. 78, 77c; *ET AT* 1.20, peperino). Sethre's body looks soft but natural, his flesh in the process of relaxing as he settles back among the cushions of his eternal banquet couch. This could have been accurate for a non-military aristocrat even though his head is a generic youthful type.

Even in smaller scale, deliberate rendering of weight and experience was

possible, as in the alabaster urn of the Chiusine priest Arnth Remzna, who wears a tunic beneath his mantle, and has the remnant strap of the apex-type hat of a divination priest (Figure 22.4) (Turfa 2005: 263–265 no. 295, said to be from the Colle necropolis of Chiusi; *ET Cl* 1.166; late third century BCE). The majority of the urns of Chiusi are in terracotta, even some that are large, one-of-a-kind sculptures, but some families commissioned special urns in fine stones such as this. Although compressed, the figure of Remzna has a slightly convex belly (although no rolls of fat), and his tunic-draped abdomen contrasts with his (now-eroded) sagging jowls and weary expression.



MARBLE SARCOPHAGUS
FROM CHIUSI OR VOLTRINA.

Upper register: Arnth, a local priest, reclining on his sarcophagus. Below him, a group of figures, including a woman, are shown in a dynamic scene, possibly a mythological episode. The figures are carved in high relief, showing detailed drapery and anatomical features.

Figure 22.4 Urn and lid with reclining effigy of the priest Arnth Remzna, late third century BCE. Alabaster. Said to be from the necropolis of Colle, Chiusi. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum, inv. MS 2458A.

Photo: Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum, image # 195078.

The quintessential *obesus etruscus* is a man ([Figure 22.5](#)) who was buried in the first half of the second century BCE, again before the Roman poets were born. Now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, the nenfro sarcophagus was made in the region of Tarquinia / Tuscania, although it was said to have been obtained from a man in Orvieto (inv. no. HIN 429; Nielsen 1996: 60–61 no. 14). The chest is finely carved with confronted sea-monsters, and the plinth of his effigy has an animal skin coverlet in low relief. While his limbs look slim enough, he has a sagging chest, rounded abdomen and rolls of fat; his head has multiple chins below a strong jaw, large nose, jowls and thick, coarse hair. He looks directly at the viewer, like a man of authority, yet his unruly hair and heavy face form a sharp contrast to such public figures in bronze as the “Brutus” or Avle Metelis. Presumably this image would have been reassuring for his family, reminding his survivors, and the Etruscan gods, of the rich banquet that he expects to enjoy in perpetuity among the ancestors in the Underworld.



Figure 22.5 Sarcophagus and lid with reclining effigy of an overweight man, first half of the second century BCE. Nenfro. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Inv. HIN 429.

Photo: by Ole Haupt/Courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

4. Conclusion

Virtually any population will include some small percentage of overweight individuals: if, as portrayed in the Etruscan effigies, these are usually mature men who have retired from an active life as statesman, priest, or soldier (as we perceive in some epitaphs like Pulenas's), we ought not to judge the overall behavior and health of society in general by a small number of unique representations. The poetic image is rather what Romans, in their own time of crisis, chose to remember, the image of the tamed Etruscan, once an oppressing warrior, now a retired man of peace. Mark Bradley (2011: 34) has opined, "An overweight or corpulent body could be a sign of health, vigour, and prosperity, whether in the fertile and nubile female form or the stocky, fleshy frame of the assertive Hellenistic ruler, the disenfranchised wealthy Etruscan elite or the grand Roman emperor. Flesh was power." Their own culture would have interpreted these Etruscan men's images as the movers and shakers responsible for their society and its well-being; outsiders might read them in a different light. Undoubtedly there were living *obesi etrusci* (and *romani et al.*, as the dead of Vesuvius have shown), but they must have been, as the early and unique sarcophagi and urns indicate, atypical examples within an affluent culture. Etruscan sarcophagi were masterworks that were often copied, but in later generations, the original fine details and technical polish were rarely achieved, failing to depict an accurate likeness of their heirs, and mimicking their substance with doughy bodies and stock-type heads. These charismatic images, like the colorful (but much later) literary sources to which they are often compared, are thus only partial witnesses to a complex culture that – as other chapters in this volume demonstrate – has too often been known to readers, scholars included, only through simplistic and distorted portrayals.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Bradley’s article 2011 expands the analysis of body imagery into Roman art and literature. Etruscan portraiture is surveyed by Carpio 2013 and readers can find illustrations of well-known personages (as well as many now-anonymous aristocrats) among the urns and sarcophagi of Chiusi, Volterra, Tarquinia, and Vulci (see Herbig 1952; Boitani 1988; Gentili 1994; and individual museum catalogues for the Museo Guarnacci Volterra, Museo Civico Archeologico Chiusi, Vatican Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Musée du Louvre, British Museum, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Metropolitan Museum New York and University of Pennsylvania Museum). Rare painted and labeled portraits appear in the François Tomb of Vulci and the Tombe dell’Orco and degli Scudi of Tarquinia, while commoners are depicted in the Tomba dei Giocolieri of Tarquinia (Aranth Heracanasa – perhaps – in an unusual pose) and the Tomba Golini of Orvieto (where servants prepare the funeral feast); see Steingraber 1985. The works of art and their social significance are placed within the framework of Etruscan culture by Sybille Haynes 2000. Studies of human skeletal material with a view to reconstructing appearance or daily life include, for Etruria, Swaddling and Prag 2002, and for Roman society, Capasso 2001; Bisel and Bisel 2002; Lazer 2009 (with some more imaginative than others: see Becker 2003).

Garnsey 1999 presents issues of nutrition, health and social situations, for Greece and Rome; for Etruria, see Turfa and Becker 2013b and Turfa 2012: 164–203.

NOTES

- 1 Dennis 1848: 448 (chap. 23). “*Turgidus epulis*” “distended from banquets,” is Dennis’s phrase, taken from Perseus *Satire* 3.13. Some authors have erroneously attributed the *obesus* charge to the historian Livy: The British Museum website description of the Volterranean Etruscan alabaster urn of Vel Umrana (inv. no. GR 1850.10-31.1) refers to “the Roman historian Livy’s stereotypical view of the *obesus etruscus* (‘fat Etruscan’)”: www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/a/alabaster_cinerary_urn.aspx (accessed August 1, 2015). Peter Nulton, in his review of *From the Temple and the Tomb* (Nulton 2010), refers to “Livy’s phrase, *obesus etruscus*.”
- 2 Inv. no. MS 3488B, from Civita Musarna, Alethna family tomb: lid 2.05 meters long; depth across end approx. 0.49 meters; Turfa 2005: 260–262 no. 293. Very similar figures are nenfro lids now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek: Nielsen 1996: 54–60 nos. 10–13.
- 3 Bonghi Jovino 1971: pls. 38–39 nos. 53 and 54, illustrated from an old photo; there were actually four such statues (three boys, one woman), but only a fragment of one boy is preserved today.
- 4 I thank Dr. Eugene Kokorin for pointing this out to me, and for other valuable advice on medical conditions and their manifestation: for more details, see Turfa forthcoming.
- 5 Capasso 2001: 259–269, 541–553, 671–680, 810–816, 901–902, 1031, 1049; but see caution of Becker 2003; also Bisel and Bisel 2002: 468–469.
- 6 *ET* = Rix, H. et al. 1991. *Etruskische Texte. Editio minor*. Tübingen.
- 7 I have not attempted to create a comprehensive catalogue of all effigies, but have checked the basic compendia of genres and recent studies: Herbig 1952; Cristofani et al. 1975; Cristofani et al. 1977; Moretti and Moretti Sgubini 1983; Catani, Galleri, and Gori 1986; Boitani 1988; Emiliozzi 1993; Gentili 1994; Sannibale 1994; Brigue, Briquel, and Pasquier 2002.

PART IV

Art, Society, and Culture

CHAPTER 23

The Etruscans, Greek Art, and the Near East

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1. Introduction

Both in antiquity and the modern era, Etruria's relationship with its eastern Mediterranean neighbors has been a central topic of investigation and debate. Ancient authors argued over the origins of the Etruscans themselves: were they an indigenous people or had they emigrated from elsewhere? Some favored a homeland in Lydia (western Anatolia) while others argued for Pelasgian roots, connecting them with a people ancestral to the Hellenes themselves. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, debates about Etruscan autochthony once again gained prominence in formulating national foundation myths and interpreting the growing archaeological evidence for this ancient people and their wide-ranging contacts (De Francesco 2013; on Etruscans' origins, see also [Chapters 13](#) and [22](#)).

The lively Iron Age interaction among Etruscans, Greeks, and peoples of the Near East in the realm of art and visual culture more broadly is currently a field of robust interdisciplinary inquiry, pursued by an international array of scholars. In much of the scholarly literature, Greece and the Near East have often been positioned as competing sources for Etruria's complex engagement with material culture and social practices at home in the eastern Mediterranean, so dramatically displayed in its archaeological remains. And in ancient and modern accounts alike, a key topic is the transfer of artistic technologies from Greece and the Near East to Etruria.

Contacts between the central Italian peninsula and regions farther east did not begin in the Iron Age. Exploration of Bronze Age sites on both eastern and western coasts of the peninsula, and on the neighboring islands of Sicily and Sardinia, has unearthed Aegean-style pottery from the mid-second to the early first millennium BCE, the periods labeled Late Helladic I to IIIC (in Italy, MBA 1-2 to FBA1-2) (Vagnetti 2010). Technical analyses reveal that the Aegean-style pottery sometimes consisted of actual imports, but more frequently of examples produced locally. Intriguingly, scholars have suggested that some of the local versions may have been made by Aegean-trained artisans or by Aegean artisans sent to Italy on a temporary basis (Betelli 2011).

But the Iron Age encounters among Etruscans, Greeks, and peoples of Near Eastern origin were unprecedented. They are distinguished not only by the large quantities of imported objects and the wide range of their local imitations or adaptations, but also by evidence for the introduction of ritual practices and social behaviors at home in mainland Greece and the Aegean, the Levant, Anatolia, and the Neo-Assyrian world. This chapter focuses on “Orientalizing” Etruria of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, a crucial period in the development of Etruscan society that witnessed the rapid transformation of village structures into urban centers with new economic and political functions. An increase in social stratification accompanied this growth in the size of communities; within a few generations, Etruscan society moved from defining social position within family groups to social hierarchy outside family groups (Riva 2010). Consequently, it was a decisive era for the Etruscan elite, who adopted and accommodated foreign styles, imagery, and cultural practices in order to communicate emerging social and political roles. Crucial transfers of technology accompanied ideas about ceremony, ritual, and the visual and material expression of elite identity.

For earlier generations of scholars, the prominent role of foreign artisans, goods, and styles in Etruria often served to confirm opinions about the inferior status of Etruscan artistic accomplishments, particularly by comparison with what were considered canonical forms of Greek art and architecture. Yet these objects, ideas, and technologies were acquired and employed for *Etruscan* social, political, and religious purposes. We should envisage instead an Etruscan elite as active agents, taking the initiative in encounters with their peers across the Mediterranean.

2. Sources and Chronology

Modern archaeological investigation of ancient Etruria, which began in the eighteenth century, has furnished rich material evidence for extensive contacts with the wider Mediterranean world (see [Chapter 6](#)). Initially, Etruria’s vast cemeteries were explored in a search for classical antiquities, yielding thousands of decorated Greek vases (Nørskov 2002: 35–64). From the 1830s onward, excavations unearthed spectacularly furnished burials whose contents included objects of Greek, Egyptian, and Near Eastern manufacture, style, or decorative formulas, fashioned in a range of valuable materials: bronze, gold, silver, faience, ivory, and clay ([Figure 23.1](#)). Other rare or clearly imported materials and objects include amber, glass, ostrich eggs, textiles, and engraved tridacna shells. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, French, and especially British, expeditions to Assyrian royal centers in northern Mesopotamia, then under Ottoman Turkish rule, discovered metal vessels resembling examples found in Etruscan tombs. Along with a chronological

framework, these finds provided a set of regionally defined styles, at first labeled “Phoenician” and “Assyrian,” for the decorated metalwork encountered first in Italy and later on Cyprus (Riva and Vella 2006: 4–7).

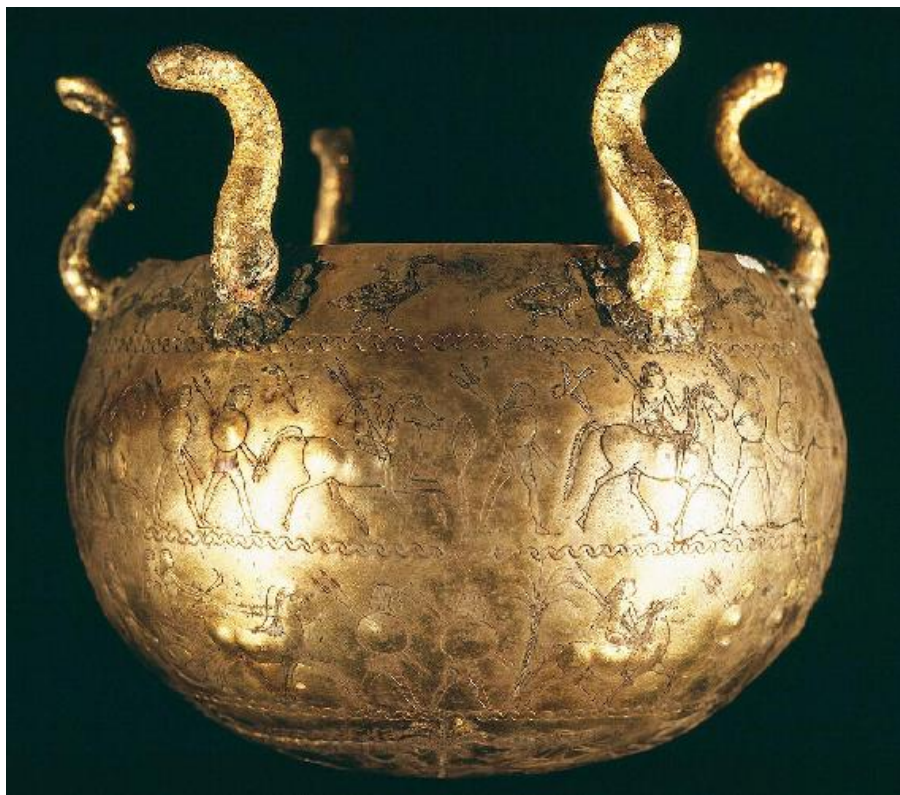


Figure 23.1 Silver relief bowl, Phoenician (or Cypro-Phoenician) in style, c.725–650 BCE.

From the Bernardini Tomb, Palestrina. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Inv. 61543. Photo: The Art Archive/Museo di Villa Giulia Rome/Gianni Dagli Orti.

Subsequent excavations at Etruscan sites along the Tyrrhenian coast and its hinterland increasingly yielded artifacts documenting interaction with the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt. By far the most material has been recovered from the large cemeteries at sites near the Tyrrhenian coast: Orvieto, Vulci, Tarquinia, Cerveteri (ancient Caere), and Veii. Many of the earliest imports and local imitations of foreign items come from a group of burials known as “princely” (*tomba principesca*), distinguished by their size and decoration, mode of interment, and numerous rich grave goods; they range in date from about 730 to 625 BCE. In Etruria proper, these include tombs in Populonia, Vetulonia, Tarquinia, Veii, and Cerveteri. Similarly furnished tombs have been found farther south, in Latium and Campania, including examples at Palestrina (ancient Praeneste), Castel di Decima, and Pontecagnano (Winther 1997; Naso 2001; d’Agostino 2004; Naso 2007).

These imports and their local versions have assisted in securing approximate dates for the burials themselves and their associated artifacts. Absolute dates for Greek Geometric pottery are in large measure derived from the traditional foundation dates for Greek colonies in South Italy and Sicily, as reconstructed especially from ancient accounts by Thucydides and Eusebius (Nijboer 2005: 256–259, with bibliography). Through cross-dating, some imports can also be tied to Egyptian and Near Eastern absolute chronologies, furnishing historical frameworks and key chronological anchors for Iron Age developments, including Etruscan tombs and funerary practices. The Bokharis Tomb at Tarquinia yielded a faience vase probably of Phoenician workmanship decorated with the cartouche of the Dynasty 24 pharaoh Bokkhoris (Bakenranef) (c.720–715 BCE), along with a necklace composed of multiple Egyptian-style faience figurines (Haynes 2000: 79–80; Naso 2001: 114–115). A scarab bearing the cartouche of the same pharaoh was recovered from a burial at Pithekoussai (modern Ischia) in the Bay of Naples, providing a chronological correlation for the associated grave goods, which included Early Protocorinthian *aryballoi* (small ceramic containers for perfume or unguents) (Ridgway 1999; Whitley 2001: 65). A lion-headed situla found in Tomb 871 at Veii finds a close counterpart in Tumulus MM at Gordion (c.740 BCE) and among representations of similar vessels depicted in the palace reliefs of the Assyrian king Sargon II (721–705 BCE) at Khorsabad (Ebbinghaus 2008: 182–184).

New evidence from radiocarbon determinations and dendrochronology has recently fueled debate over Early Iron Age chronology in the central Mediterranean, with the potential for significantly raising long-established dates for the period 1100–700 BCE (Brandherm and Trachsel 2008; Nijboer 2008). While scholars have not yet reached consensus on this new chronology, research in this area will have profound consequences for understanding a crucial era in the history of Mediterranean interaction.

3. “Orientalizing” Etruria

In current scholarship, the term “Orientalizing” commonly describes the introduction and reception of Near Eastern objects, persons, and cultural practices, both in Etruria proper and in other regions of central Italy where Etruscans and their culture had spread, including Latium and Campania. In his pioneering monograph on Greek Orientalizing art, F. Poulsen (1912) identified its sources in an eclectic group of regionally defined styles – Egyptian, Assyrian, Hittite, and Phoenician – and documented their westward movement to Cyprus, the Aegean, and Italy, whose tombs had already yielded a number of imports. By the 1960s, studies of Etruscan Orientalizing art could draw on far more extensive published evidence, and they offered a range of

opinions concerning the nature and mechanisms of contact with the eastern Mediterranean. W. L. Brown's (1960) classic study postulated Near Eastern craftsmen arriving in central Italy soon after 700 BCE, while M. Pallottino (1965) argued instead that the Orientalizing style developed in response to Near Eastern works of art imported to Italy. Still others saw Greek Orientalizing art as the source of Etruscan Orientalizing developments. Ingrid Strøm's (1971) thoughtful analysis sought to elucidate the origins of Etruscan Orientalizing style through an exhaustive review of tomb contents, seeking to establish a relative chronology based on datable imports. She concluded that the style developed in southern Etruria between the late eighth and mid-seventh centuries, and she also offered valuable comparisons with Greek Orientalizing styles.

As in the Iron Age Aegean sphere, in Etruria the label "Orientalizing" frequently designates a discrete chronological span: the era following the Early Iron Age or Villanovan period (conventionally dated c.1000–750 BCE). In most accounts, the Orientalizing period in Etruria extends from the late eighth to the early sixth century BCE. Although contacts between Etruscans and Greeks increased significantly following the establishment of settlements on the Italian peninsula, Near Eastern influence in Etruscan art and architecture seems to have remained vital throughout the seventh century (Serra Ridgway 2001). Rathje, for example, argues that the subjects of the terracotta friezes on the early sixth-century "Upper Building" at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) – including banqueting (see [Figure 23.3](#)), an assembly, and a procession – evoke a "courtly setting of dignified behavior and ritual," echoing the iconographic programs of Neo-Assyrian palace decoration (Rathje 2007: 178; see further, [Chapter 8](#)). Most scholars today would acknowledge that the developments in Etruria often grouped under the label "Orientalizing" were part of a broader Mediterranean trend. In Greece and Cyprus, too, political and social elites incorporated and adopted luxury items of foreign manufacture along with exotic artistic styles, materials, and crafting technologies.

Nor was Etruria's cultural interaction with a broad expanse of the Mediterranean limited to the *westward* movement of goods, ideas, and persons. Etruscan armor and other bronze objects were deposited as votive offerings in several Greek sanctuaries, chiefly the panhellenic sanctuary at Olympia but also at Dodona, the Heraion on Samos, and perhaps Delphi. The best-known groups of objects include bronze armor (shields and helmets), horse harness, thrones, fibulae, and personal ornament (Naso 2000; Camporeale 2004a; Gran-Aymerich with Turfa 2013). According to the ancient author Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, the first non-Greek to make a dedication at Olympia was Arimnestos, an Etruscan ruler, who offered a throne. Etruscan Caere (Cerveteri) maintained a treasury at Delphi (von Hase 1981: 17). Etruscan bucchero ware, initially developed in

workshops in Cerveteri about 675 BCE, appears in many locations throughout the Mediterranean, and its popular two-handled *kantharos* shape influenced the Greek ceramic repertoire (Spivey 1991: 139–140). Between the late seventh and the mid-sixth century, Etruscan bucchero *kantharoi* and bronze strainers – equipment employed in wine-drinking – reached the eastern Mediterranean, where they are typically found in sanctuaries: at Ithaca, Corinth, Perachora, Athens, Chios, Samos, and Rhodes, for example (Camporeale 1994: 95; Gran-Aymerich with Turfa 2013: 379–401).

4. Etruscans, Greeks, and Phoenicians

Ancient accounts describing Phoenician and Greek settlement and activity in the central Mediterranean have long furnished a broad historical framework, which archaeological investigations have significantly elaborated and refined. Greeks and Phoenicians were present on or near the Italian peninsula and adjacent islands, including Sicily, from the Early Iron Age onward. Beginning in the ninth century or perhaps earlier, Phoenicians established settlements along the Mediterranean coasts both north and south as far west as Spain and Portugal, including the islands of Sardinia and Malta (Aubet 2001; Antonaccio 2009). From the mid-eighth century onward, Greeks from the mainland and the eastern Aegean founded settlements of various types (*emporía*, *apoikiai*) in south Italy and on Sicily, conducting trade with native Italic peoples such as the Etruscans (d’Agostino 2006). Etruscan settlements along the Tyrrhenian coast served as commercial conduits for its inland centers: Pyrgi for Cerveteri, for example, and Gravisca for Tarquinia.

The site of Pithekoussai, on the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples opposite Campania, vividly illustrates the impressively multicultural character of this interaction. Ancient sources claim that the settlement was founded by the Greek city-states of Chalkis and Eretria on Euboea. Extensive excavations at Pithekoussai have established not only its early settlement – by 770 BCE – but also its diverse population: Euboians and Corinthians, Phoenicians, and indigenous peoples apparently lived and worked there (Ridgway 2000). Clear evidence for cultural interaction among these groups in the realm of material culture and social practices complicates attempts to isolate “Greek” from “Near Eastern” as sources for Etruscan Orientalizing developments, both within nearby Campania and in the Etruscan centers farther north along the Tyrrhenian Sea. Such complexity is evident in the adoption of new vessels for eating and drinking, a key component of cultural transfer and interaction in this period. In the central and western Mediterranean, Phoenicians certainly incorporated the Greek two-handled drinking cup (*skyphos*) into their dining

repertoire. At Pithekoussai, Phoenician Red Slip plates occur along with locally made copies and free adaptations, suggesting that resident Phoenicians introduced the neighboring Euboian settlers to this previously unfamiliar vessel shape (Coldstream 2006: 49–50).

While Greeks and Phoenicians were surely the most numerous, proximate, and important “Eastern” peoples for the Etruscans, they were not the sole participants in this global Mediterranean interaction. Many aspects of Etruscan knowledge of Near Eastern and Greek traditions cannot be neatly explained as the result of transfer via commercial networks or Phoenician intermediaries. Certain features of funerary architecture, tomb furnishings, religious concepts, iconographical programs, and cultural practices distinctly indicate first-hand acquaintance with elite customs and spheres of esoteric knowledge in other regions of southwest Asia, including Anatolia, North Syria, and other areas within the orbit of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Since no contemporaneous written sources elucidate Etruscan interaction with foreign artisans or craft traditions, scholars reconstruct these relationships by examining and interpreting the material record and its contexts.

5. Developments in Funerary Practices

One of the hallmarks of Etruscan Orientalizing is the appearance of new funerary practices. While cremation burials in small, biconical urns were characteristic of the Villanovan period, in the eighth century elite members of society began to be interred in large, visually prominent tombs. Built above ground with stone slabs, or dug out of the bedrock and covered with a tumulus mound, these tombs reached monumental proportions soon after 700 BCE (see [Figure 11.1](#)) (Prayon 2001a). Specific features of the tumuli have been convincingly traced to monuments in western Anatolia, both in Lydia and the East Greek sphere. Along with their grand scale and certain features of structural design, Etruscan tumuli share with Lydian burial monuments a stone basement decorated with moldings in the form of circular rings, while similarities with East Greek tumuli include profiled stone bases (Prayon 2001b: 343–344). Perhaps the Etruscans’ Anatolian network extended even farther east to embrace the tumulus burials of Phrygian Gordion, the largest of which, Tumulus MM, has recently been re-dated to about 740 BCE and therefore was built before the earliest Etruscan examples (Sams 2011). The presence of specifically Etruscan features, however, including large-scale ramps used in burial rituals and ground plans similar to local house-plans, indicates that these foreign architectural elements were incorporated into indigenous building traditions and funerary practices (Prayon 2001b: 344).

Larger tombs could accommodate multiple interments and ritual activities, and they could also house greater quantities of grave goods. Elite tombs in

Etruria contained equipment employed during funerary rituals and items deposited to accompany the deceased, as the lavish contents of more or less intact burials repeatedly demonstrate: furniture and vehicles, banquet service, weapons and armor, status objects such as fans and scepters, and items of personal adornment, typically fashioned from valuable materials (Naso 2001: 121–129). In the first half of the seventh century, the practice of painting tomb interiors with scenes including humans, animals, and mythical creatures was introduced in Veii and Cerveteri. While many scholars credit foreign artisans with these developments, too little is known about Etruscan domestic architecture entirely to dismiss the possibility that large-scale funerary decoration drew from local practices (Naso 2010: 82; see also [Chapter 17](#)).

As with tomb architecture, monumentality was also introduced to the realm of sculpture, and in this development the early seventh century BCE was likewise a critical moment. The earliest known large-scale sculptures (c.1.23 meters in height) were recovered in the 1970s from the front room of a chamber tomb in Ceri, a small town near Cerveteri. Carved from local tufa, the enthroned pair from the Tomb of the Statues (c.680 BCE) was initially identified as two male figures, perhaps representing ancestors of the deceased. More recently they have been plausibly reinterpreted as a man and a woman, thus representing a husband and wife (Prayon 2004: 85–91). The statues find close counterparts among stone funerary statues in the form of a seated couple in the Neo-Hittite/North Syrian realm, particularly examples from the site of Tell Halaf. Indeed, the formal and iconographic parallels between the Ceri statues and Neo-Hittite/North Syrian models are so pronounced that many scholars consider the sculptures to be the work of artisans trained in the North Syrian region or at least strongly inspired by its monuments (Haynes 2000: 74–75; Camporeale 2013: 889–890; Sannibale 2013: 116).

Clearly, cultural and artistic interactions between Etruria and the Near East were not limited to chance acquisitions obtained through commercial channels, or to haphazard “borrowing” of foreign objects or decorative formulas simply because they were “exotic” and somehow available. None of the silver relief bowls mentioned earlier, for example, were found in the Greek colonies of Italy (Strøm 2001: 365). Detailed studies of artifacts and their associated imagery increasingly suggest instead that Etruscan patronage was informed and programmatic in its acquisition and use of foreign objects and the subjects of their decoration (see further, [Chapters 24](#) and [26](#)). Both the imports and the locally produced works they inspired strongly favor specific iconographies, above all images of the fertility goddess Astarte and motifs related to her. This imagery so dominates that it suggests the deliberate choice of a “package of alien iconographies” especially appropriate to aristocratic concern with fertility and its divine sanction, surely felt most keenly on the occasion of a death (Tuck 2012: 45–46). Analysis of the spectacular gold objects recovered from the Regolini Galassi tomb at Cerveteri (675–650

BCE), an intact burial excavated in 1836, also suggests a conscious program of decoration governing the selection of images and motifs. M. Sannibale (2013: 109–115) has recognized in their figural and ornamental details multiple references to fertility and regeneration, incorporating images of deities and their symbolic representation that draw on both native and foreign funerary traditions, including those of Egypt. The Etruscan reception of Greek ceramic imports likewise reveals a knowledgeable selection of foreign models, as several scholars have convincingly demonstrated (Spivey 1991; Osborne 2001; Rasmussen 2013).

6. Foreign Artisans and Artistic Technologies

Among other Roman authors, Pliny (*Natural History* 35.152) tells the story of Demaratos, a wealthy merchant exiled from his native Corinth, who moved to Tarquinia around 650 BCE and founded a line of kings of Rome.

Accompanying him were specialists in the modeling of clay named Eucheir, Diopos, and Eugrammos, who introduced the craft to Italy. Along with clear archaeological evidence for connections with Corinth in the form of imported vases and architectural terracottas, this ancient literary account helped encourage modern scholarly attention to the formative role of foreign – especially Greek – artisans in Etruscan art, architecture, and craft traditions.

The Aristonothos krater ([Figure 23.2](#)), named for the artisan who signed the vase, is frequently invoked to illustrate the profound cultural interaction between Greeks and Etruscans as well as the presence of Greek artisans in Etruria. On one side is a scene of Odysseus and his companions blinding the Cyclops Polyphemos, an episode narrated in Homeric epic (*Odyssey* 9). This side also preserves the oldest known signature of a Greek artist, written in the Euboian alphabet. The other side depicts a sea battle, perhaps between Greeks and Etruscans. The vessel's shape indicates its function as a mixing-bowl for water and wine, hence its central function in communal wine-drinking. The krater, its decoration, and its deposition in an Etruscan tomb demonstrate that Greek artisans did travel to Etruria and produced works for local patrons from the early seventh century onward.



Figure 23.2 Odysseus and his companions blinding the Cyclops Polyphemos on the Aristonothos krater (Side B), c.670–650 BCE.

From Caere. Rome, Musei Capitolini, Inv. no. CA 172. Photo: by Leemage/UIG via Getty Images.

The Greeks introduced to the Etruscans a tradition of light-fired ceramic vessels decorated with geometric designs, perhaps initially via settlements such as Pithekoussai and later through Greek colonies in south Italy and Sicily. During the seventh century, one or more two-handled drinking cups (*skyphoi*) with chevron ornament became a regular feature of Etruscan burials. Protocorinthian *aryballoi* display new ornamental patterns and a lively and distinctive figural repertoire that included animals in combat – a style arguably created specifically to advertise the vessels’ sought-after, exotic contents (Rasmussen 1991: 66). Ceramic vases decorated in black-figure style from Corinth have been recovered from Etruscan tombs in significant quantities beginning in the late seventh century. Their popularity stimulated a local “Etrusco-Corinthian” production based in Vulci and Cerveteri, which lasted for nearly a century; scholars have distinguished multiple workshops and even individual artisans (Ambrosini 2013: 950–952). Figural styles of decoration developed in the East Greek world, such as stacked friezes of animals that characterized Orientalizing pottery in Ionia or Rhodes, are also represented in Etruria. One well-studied example of local manufacture by foreign artisans is the group of *hydriai*, or vessels for carrying water, produced at Cerveteri (Caere) between about 530 and 500 BCE by two potters

and painters from Ionia, who signed their works. Some 40 examples of this workshop have been identified, distinguished by their colorful decoration and interest in mythological imagery, particularly the exploits of Herakles and Dionysiac scenes (Hemelrijk 1984).

In addition, the late eighth and seventh centuries witnessed a rich mix of influences in shape, ornament, theme, and technologies of production and decoration in locally produced ceramic vessels. In the early seventh century, alongside a local tradition of dark-fired impasto wares, developed the more refined dark-fired bucchero wares, which often imitated the colors, gleaming surfaces, and sharp contours of more costly metal vessels. Bronze ribbed drinking bowls (*patere bacellate*), banqueting equipment at home in the Neo-Assyrian world as well as widely distributed between the eighth and sixth centuries, were imitated, not only in metal but also in bucchero.

Some of the craft traditions associated with Orientalizing developments almost certainly required the local presence of foreign artisans, at least initially, or an extended apprenticeship abroad. For carved ivories, for example, both the raw material and long-established expertise in working and decorating furniture, figurines, and containers were at home along the Syrian and Phoenician coast and its hinterland. Goldsmiths from the Near East, perhaps Phoenicians, introduced granulation and other fine metalworking techniques, such as filigree, in the eighth century or earlier (Camporeale 2013: 888; Gaultier 2013: 915–919). Other artistic technologies that initially came from elsewhere included new methods of preparing, refining, and firing clay. M. Sannibale (2013: 108–109) has rightly emphasized the importance of symbolic qualities accorded to valuable materials such as gold, and the close ties between crafting and forms of esoteric knowledge – including the scribal arts – that would have been communicated by artisans from the Near East to their local counterparts.

Imports did not always stimulate the local production of closely similar items, however. The silver-gilt bowls with elaborate relief decoration (see [Figure 23.1](#)) may comprise one such group, characterized by a circumscribed range of shapes, subjects, and decorative schemes (Rathje 1980). They have a limited distribution in Etruria, Latium, and Campania, where they appear in tombs dating from about 725 to 650 BCE. The bowls formed part of the early Etruscan banqueting service, along with silver-gilt jugs with palmette handles, which display a similar geographical and chronological range. Some scholars have postulated that the examples found in Italy were made in workshops established by immigrant silversmiths from Cyprus, where closely related silver-gilt bowls have been found, perhaps in collaboration with local artisans (Markoe 1985: 146–148; 2003). Yet close studies of the vessels' ornament and archaeological contexts point to an origin on the Phoenician mainland (Strøm 2001: 361–367). The silver bowls and jugs join other imported vessels that comprise elite Etruscan banqueting service in the eighth and seventh

centuries and represent a range of regionally defined styles – Phoenician, Neo-Hittite/North Syrian, Assyrian, Greek – along with locally made items.

Scholars have occasionally postulated that Assyrian conquests in the Phoenician homeland in the mid- to late eighth century drove Phoenician traders and artisans to the central Mediterranean or farther west (cf. Fletcher 2012). Yet Assyrian conquest and annexation of foreign territory most often resulted instead in the forced resettlement of foreign experts, above all craft specialists, in the Assyrian royal centers in northern Mesopotamia (Gunter 2009: 160–164; Radner 2009). In this period, artisans typically moved from commission to commission; qualified artisans might move in search of better or steadier employment, but were not “itinerant” as a way of life (Zaccagnini 1983: 258–259). Artisans certainly also traveled in the employ of political elites, as perhaps reflected in the story of Demaratos mentioned earlier. Developments in monumental funerary architecture and sculpture, as with tumuli and large-scale stone statuary, likely required the on-site presence of architects and stone-carvers. In addition, the transfer of specialized crafting technologies and the highly programmatic character of Etruscan funerary iconography, as already noted, argues forcefully for close and knowledgeable contacts between elite families and their counterparts elsewhere.

Still other evidence for cultural contacts between the Neo-Assyrian world and Italy, especially Etruria and Latium, suggests the informed reception not only of an elite “lifestyle” including banqueting with particular kinds of equipment, but also of learning and cultural practices specifically associated with the Assyrian court. A recent study of the Etruscan Brontoscopic Calendar, a document used in interpreting thunder-omens preserved in a Byzantine Greek translation, confirms its clear sources in Mesopotamian divination literature (Turfa 2012: 241–277). At the Assyrian court, specialists in esoteric knowledge – diviners, astrologer/scribes, exorcists, physicians, and lamentation-singers – supervised the planning and execution of many works of art or places where they were housed. They also advised on the favorable siting and timing of myriad enterprises, from the fashioning of figurines for specific rituals to the founding of an entire city (Gunter 2009: 158–160; Radner 2011). For many foreign artisans, perhaps including those postulated for on-site commissions, craft training and apprenticeship would have been inseparable from other forms of esoteric knowledge. Technological and other stylistic choices were shaped by tradition and the symbolic or ritual properties bestowed on materials and their sources; the crafting process itself was culturally defined and meaningful.

7. Banqueting and Its Visual and Material Culture

Among the new social practices that characterize Etruscan Orientalizing

developments, communal banqueting and wine-drinking are surely among the most widely attested and extensively discussed in recent scholarship (Nijboer 2013; Rathje 2013, both with bibliography). The Aristonothos krater (see [Figure 23.2](#)) richly illustrates how Greek artists participated in and mediated a shared Etruscan and Greek interest in a constellation of cultural practices, including wine-drinking (and its material and visual culture) and the oral performance of Homeric epic (Malkin 2002; Dougherty 2003). Likewise, in the early to mid-sixth century, representations of banquets appeared in Etruria as a subject of architectural decoration (e.g., the terracotta plaques from Acquarossa and Poggio Civitate (Murlo)) ([Figure 23.3](#)) (see further, [Chapter 8](#)), and subsequently, on a much larger scale, on painted tomb interiors.



Figure 23.3 The banquet frieze plaque from Poggio Civitate (Murlo), c.575 BCE. Rendering by Courtney McKenna. Antiquarium di Poggio Civitate, Inv. 112591.

Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

Like the Etruscan Orientalizing style or phenomena more broadly, both Greece and the Near East have been credited with introducing to Etruscan elites the custom of communal dining and wine-drinking. Banqueting as an established funerary custom, however, certainly pre-dated widespread Etruscan contact with those Greek and Near Eastern cultures in which formal communal feasting was institutionalized. In the Villanovan period, to judge by representations of diners and the arrangement of burial urns in tombs, banquets were typically seated gatherings. From the late eighth century, tomb furnishings began to include new kinds of objects reflecting shapes and ornament at home in the eastern Mediterranean, such as metal drinking vessels and other feasting and wine-drinking paraphernalia: iron or bronze spits (*obeloi*) for roasting meat, Phoenician wine amphorae, metal cheese-graters, and ceramic tripod-bowls for grinding spices that were mixed with the wine (Riva 2010: 144–146). Bronze ribbed drinking bowls were widely

distributed throughout the Mediterranean and Near East in the ninth to sixth centuries BCE. Among the approximately 400 examples assembled in a recent catalogue, over 300 were found on the Italian peninsula, chiefly in the “princely tombs”; they were either imports from the Near East or, more typically, locally produced artifacts (Sciacca 2005: 395). The discovery of a banquet service in an Etruscan settlement at Ficana in Latium identical to those in tomb deposits demonstrates that similar equipment was used by the living, and was not specially produced for funerary use (Rathje 1990; 1994).

Early scholarship often considered Etruscan banquets to be nearly exact replicas of the Greek symposia, and in certain respects Etruscan practices appear to emulate Greek ones. Etruscan art, for example, often depicts banqueters as reclining on couches in the manner of the Greek symposion (see [Figure 23.3](#)). In addition, Greek vessel shapes deposited in wealthy Etruscan tombs include kraters, pouring vessels, and drinking cups for the mixing, serving, and consuming of wine. Other scholars emphasize the special features the Etruscans introduced to transform foreign banqueting practices into an indigenous practice: Greek symposia were male social rituals, while in Etruria females were present (Small 1994). A. J. Nijboer (2013) has also recently discerned multiple cultural strands in communal drinking and dining in the Iron Age Mediterranean, distinguishing the Greek symposion both from the Italian banquet (symposium) and the marzeah tradition practiced in the Levant.

8. Conclusion

Ancient literary tradition and modern scholarly approaches have often painted a picture of Etruria in the eighth and seventh centuries as a region connected to broader Mediterranean developments primarily through Greek or Phoenician initiative and proximity. Recent scholarship increasingly argues instead that internal social and political changes in Etruria drove much of the artistic and cultural interaction with the eastern Mediterranean. As Etruscan elites sought to assert and exhibit new social and political hierarchies, they often turned to established models and practices, along with associated forms of visual and material expression. Foreign motifs, objects, and features were selected for, and incorporated within, indigenous funerary and religious traditions.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Well-illustrated, up-to-date surveys of Etruscan art with valuable coverage of “Orientalizing” developments include Spivey 1997, Haynes 2000 and Torelli 2001 (a sumptuously illustrated exhibition catalogue). Turfa 2013 is a comprehensive new resource for many of the issues discussed here; especially relevant are Camporeale 2013, Rasmussen 2013, Sannibale 2013, and Winter 2013. Rathje 2010 offers thoughtful comments on current research.

Several recent scholarly symposia treat Etruria’s connections with the eastern Mediterranean sphere: Prayon and Röllig 2000; Bonfante and Karageorghis 2001; and Novák et al. 2004. Antonaccio 2009 surveys Greek and Phoenician activity in the central and western Mediterranean.

Carpino 2011 provides an annotated scholarly bibliography, updated periodically.

All references cited in this chapter furnish additional bibliography.

CHAPTER 24

Etruscan Artists

Jocelyn Penny Small

1. Introduction

Years ago I quipped that if an object is good, it is Greek; if it is rotten, it is Roman; and if it is execrable, it is Etruscan. While Roman art has undergone and continues to undergo a rehabilitation, Etruscan art remains, even to many Etruscan scholars, unworthy of the term “art” with only artisans and never artists. Yet the idea that the Etruscans over the course of some 800 years produced no one worthy of the classification “artist” seems unlikely. Certainly the Romans believed the Etruscans excelled in working with terracotta and bronze. Nonetheless, remarkably fine Etruscan “objects” such as the paintings in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing and the bronze Chimaera from Arezzo are still considered Greek by some scholars. In this chapter, I present the case for Etruscan artists.¹ I focus on the areas in which Etruscan artists excelled, but also where they were innovators and distinguished themselves from the Greeks by imposing their own interpretations in style and subjects.

2. What is Art?

It is well-known that the Greeks and the Romans had no words for “art” and “artist,” but, instead, referred to “art” as a “*technē*” practiced by “artisans.” The scholarly literature on the subject is vast and the debate will probably never be resolved, because it is more an issue of semantics than substance. Here I present only a few arguments on the subject. To a certain extent, the problem reflects the contention of the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, embodied in the Newspeak of George Orwell, that if you do not have a word for something, then you do not have the concept. Yet one can define an idea or thing by using more than a single word. Only by examining the cultural context can one establish the existence of a particular concept. In this case, anyone reading Pliny the Elder about sculpture or painting, the guidebook of Pausanias to Greece, or the *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder realizes that the way objects are described resembles how art historians do it today. In fact, Philostratus describes pictures displayed in a purported gallery, which today we would call a museum. If it looks and acts like art, surely it must be art.

Despite the modern claim that “the Greeks had a word for it,” the truth is that they often did not have a word for “it.” In fact, they devoted much effort to trying to figure out how to describe things for which no words existed. One example should suffice. The Greek word “*grapho*” means to write, draw, and paint. Does that mean that they thought all their writers were painters? No modern scholar has ever suggested that, even though he or she might have discussed the idea that classical “man” did not have our concept of “artist.” Hence I am suggesting that the Greek “*techne*” and the Latin “*ars*” worked like “*grapho*” to cover the entire range from craft to art. At the same time as many scholars argue that the Greeks do not have a word for “artist,” they also maintain that the Greeks had “artists” and “Art” with a capital “A,” at least in modern terms. This belief has two implications. First, despite all that is written about whether the Greeks had a word that meant “artist,” most scholars believe that the Greeks did produce “art” and not just “craft.” In other words, the important point is whether *we* believe that *they* had *art*. Second, one can reasonably maintain either that the Greeks, like the Etruscans and the Romans, had *no* artists *or all* three cultures had artists.

So, if we grant the Greeks and Romans “art” and of necessity “artists” to produce that art, where does that leave the Etruscans? Do they have art? And exactly what is “art”? As often happens, the definition of “art” resembles the famous Supreme Court definition of “pornography” by Justice Potter Stewart in 1964. You know it when you see it – except for one problem: what passes for pornography in one era may be perfectly acceptable in another. Classical male sculptures grew fig leaves in the Renaissance, American television made sure “Jeannie” (1965–70) never showed her navel; today, as Cole Porter put it, “anything goes.” Art, too, is a moving target. Hence it is not surprising that, in an era that exalted Greek art, Etruscan artists would be viewed as incompetent copyists of the “higher” Greek art. Today, however, we recognize that the aim of art need not be limited to the imitation of nature, as the Greeks and the Romans believed, but that art can also be abstract, to name just one characteristic. The best of Etruscan art imitates neither nature nor Greek art. Quintilian (12.10.1–2) in the first century CE already understood this fact when writing about rhetoric and orators:

But they [orators] differ greatly from one another, and not merely in *species*, as statue differs from statue, picture from picture and speech from speech, but in *genus* as well, as, for example, Etruscan statues differ from the Greek and Asiatic orators from Attic. But these different kinds of work ... are not merely the product of different authors, but have each their own following of admirers, with the result that the perfect orator has not yet been found, a statement which perhaps may be extended to all arts ... because one single form will not satisfy all critics, a fact which is due in part to conditions of time or place, in part to the taste and ideals of individuals

We might also want to consider the judgment of artists themselves. For example, Giacometti, considered to be an artist by most scholars, believed Etruscan works were “art” and was so entranced by the Etruscan “skinny” statuettes that he adapted their form, in the classical sense of emulation as not an exact copy but, in today’s terms, as a riff on the original. I discuss an example of the type later.

3. Who are the Artists? Greeks or Etruscans?

The Etruscans – and to a lesser extent the Romans – present one other major issue alluded to in my opening paragraph. Many scholars believe that the best works of Etruscan art were produced by Greek artists working in Etruria. According to our literary sources, artists from Corinth did emigrate to Tarquinia, as discussed below. The question then becomes whether these emigrants are producing “pure” Greek art, a mixture of Greek and local art, or “pure” Etruscan art, *and* whether these choices remain the same over time. Do these “Greek” artists, for example, begin to assimilate and so move from “pure” Greek art to a mixture of styles? What kind of art do their “students” and followers make? Caeretan black-figure hydrias, one of the battlegrounds, encapsulates the issues. Approximately 40 vases share a distinctive style of bold colors used to great decorative effect (Hemelrijk 1984). In support of Greek artists for this group is the lone fragmentary vase with Greek inscriptions for the very Greek subject of the Greek embassy to Achilles recounted in the *Iliad* (Paris, Musée du Louvre inv no. C 321. Hemelrijk 1984: 46–47 no. 30 with pls. 106–108, and discussion 81–83 with fig. 48). Hemelrijk (1984: 83) proposes that the vase was begun by the Busiris Painter and completed by the Eagle Painter who, Hemelrijk says, added the Greek inscriptions including the unusual name for Odysseus, “Odios,” as in *Iliad* 9.167. Whether or not that is the case does not affect the current discussion, although we do know that vases were frequently produced by two different people, the potter and the painter. By analogy with later artistic practices, *the* major artist might lay out the basic scene and do the difficult parts, while leaving the details to be filled in by others in the workshop. In the case of this Caeretan vase, the implication may be that only one painter was literate and, in particular, in Greek not Etruscan. Does that mean that the other painters in this workshop were also Greek? We do not know.

At the same time the issue of assimilation needs to be considered. In some ways it resembles the related problems of “generations” and cultural “time lag.” How do we deal with an artist long past his prime and still producing old-style objects? Can we recognize that his later works are contemporary with a major change in style? For example, if a black-figure painter continued

to work in the old style 20 years after the introduction of red-figure, we would probably date those works 20 years earlier unless we had sufficient information about the context of their findspots. Similarly, it used to be widely held that there was a time lag, roughly one generation or 20 years, in the Etruscans' adoption of Greek models (see [Chapter 25](#)). Yet it has always seemed to me that as soon as a Greek or foreign object arrives in Etruria, it can be copied. In fact, if it is not copied immediately, it most likely will be "lost" forever. By analogy, then, how long does it take a foreign artist to cease producing objects in the style he was trained and switch to the local style? It probably depends on the individual artist and ranges from immediately to never. In the case of the latter, if a Greek vase-painter were working in Etruria, would we be able to distinguish his work from something produced in Greece itself? Probably not on stylistic grounds, but only if we were able to analyze the source of the clay to pinpoint that it was local.

I think that American scholars may view assimilation differently from their European colleagues. I know from my experience in teaching at a large state university with a large number of first-generation Americans that all my students looked and acted like Americans through and through. They might be more "foreign" at home, but not on campus. Consider what Judith Rich Harris (2009: 179) says:

Immigrant cultures are generally lost after one, two, or at most three generations. Sociologists regard this as a gradual process, but it only appears to be gradual. It is gradual for the group as a whole but not for individual families. The old culture is lost in a single generation as soon as a family moves away from the Chinatown or the Mexican-American neighborhood to an area where they are no longer surrounded by people of the same national background. What makes it look gradual is that families don't all move away at the same time. Some go as soon as they can afford to, others wait a generation or two.

In short, some artists were probably very fast assimilators whose work could not be distinguished from the local production.

The quick adaptors I suspect may have been more successful, because they more readily adjusted to the needs of their patrons. One major caveat must be mentioned. We have little direct information about patrons and clients for the Greeks and the Romans, and virtually none for the Etruscans. Peter Stewart (2008: 11), who ably presents the murky issues involved, begins with the statement that "The problem of Roman art is that it does not appear to have a well-defined cultural identity of its own. It is very hard to determine just what is *Roman* about it." To me, one of Roman art's hallmarks is its very eclecticism, which it shares to a lesser extent with Etruscan art. That is, Etruscan art is sufficiently of a piece that only in rare cases – certain gems, for example – can one mistake an Etruscan work for a Greek one. More

importantly, Etruscan art can be dated with far more ease than, for instance, Roman “copies” of purported Greek originals. Greek art, of course, does not generally have the problem of definition, as so much of it hews closely to the trajectory of ever-increasing knowledge about how to make depicted figures and objects look “real.” In addition, the ancient Greeks had the reputation of being singularly narrow-minded after the Orientalizing period (710–600 BCE), when they still were very receptive to outside influences.

Let us now return to the Caeretan vases. Assuming – and this is a safe assumption, since the vases with known findspots are from Italy and more specifically Etruria itself – that the buyers were Etruscan, did they have any effect on the end product? The closest analogy would be the contemporary Attic black-figure vases by, for example, Lydos, which means “the Lydian.” These vases, while distinctive enough to be recognized as being by Lydos, nonetheless, look so much like all other Attic black-figure vases that no one, not knowing the name of the painter, would ever pick them out as being made by an emigrant. Somewhat enigmatic is an Attic red-figure fragment attributed to the workshop of the Penthesilea Painter with a painted signature in Etruscan that says “Metru made it.”² Clearly, then, at least for Attic vases, where the painter came from had no noticeable effect on the actual vase.

Why should the situation be any different for a foreign painter working in Etruria? The Caeretan Eagle Painter may well have been Greek, but he has to adapt his work to appeal to his local Etruscan buyers who want an Etruscan product. That is, there is no reason why an Etruscan buyer might not buy both Etruscan *and* Greek vases. Certainly many of the best quality Greek vases are found in Etruscan tombs, even though, for example, the vases depicted in the tomb paintings are often locally made, as evidenced by their distinctive shapes (Small 1994: 38–39). Furthermore, if the Eagle Painter, for the sake of argument, was Greek, it does not mean that his colleagues were also Greeks, as Lydos’s fellow painters were probably Athenian. In support of this group of vases as Etruscan are the results from a study I did of the orientation of the scenes on Etruscan black-figure vases (Small 1987). I found that the statistical profile for Caeretan vases matched that for other Etruscan black-figure vases and not that for Attic black-figure ones (Small 1987: 131–132). Hence the Etruscans, like most other patrons of art, “controlled” the output sufficiently to make sure that locally made products looked locally made and not foreign.

Named Etruscan Artists: Vulca

While we have numerous mentions in Greek and Latin texts to Greek artists, the name of only one Etruscan artist has survived. Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 35.157) says:

He [Varro] also states that this art [of working with clay] had already been

brought to perfection by Italy and especially by Etruria; that Vulca was summoned from Veii to receive the contract from Tarquinius Priscus for a statue of Jupiter to be consecrated in the Capitol, and this Jupiter was made of clay and consequently was regularly painted with cinnabar; and that the four-horse chariots about which we spoke above on the pediment of the temple were modelled in clay

(translation by Rackham 1952: 377).

This passage tells us two things. First, in the Archaic period, Etruria not Greece was the source for the best artists in Italy north of “Magna Graecia.” Second, like today, artists took commissions outside their native cities. Archaeology provides support for this fact, since identical terracotta friezes with banquet scenes have been found on several sites (Small 1971: 45–46). I think it is important to note that Pliny stresses the excellence of the local production (see also [Chapter 17](#)), because all too often scholars emphasize the account in Strabo (5.2.2), who says:

But it was after the founding of Rome that Demaratus arrived, bringing with him a host of people from Corinth; and, since he was received by the Tarquinians, he married a native woman by whom he begot Lucumo. And since Lucumo had proved a friend to Ancus Marcius, the king of the Romans, he was made king, and his name was changed to Tarquinius Priscus. Be that as it may, he too adorned Tyrrhenia [Etruria], as his father had done before him – the father by means of the goodly supply of artisans who had accompanied him from home and the son by means of the resources supplied by Rome

(translation from Jones 1923: 339).

Nancy Winter (2005; 2009: [Chapter 3](#)) believes that the Bacchiads, of whom Demaratus was one, continued to control terracotta production in much of Italy from Syracuse in Sicily to Rome and Tarquinia in the middle of Italy proper, and even in the north at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) just south of Siena (see further, [Chapter 8](#)). It is extremely unlikely that one family in the sixth century BCE could have had a monopoly over such a length of time and so great a geographical span (remember that Corinth in mainland Greece is also included), especially when relations between cities in Italy were so fractious. Moreover, Pliny implies that it is Veii, not Rome or Tarquinia, that is the artistic center. That view accords with Livy’s (2.49.2; 5.22.8) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s (2.54.3) descriptions of Veii as the most powerful of Etruscan cities. According to Meyers (2010: 319), Poggio Colla in the north “argue[s] for a vibrant tile industry with regional preferences for forms of tile and installation practices.” Also it needs to be kept in mind that “students” often exceed their “teachers” in skill and artistry. So, even if a particular technique was brought to Etruria by Greeks, it does not inevitably mean that the Etruscans could not surpass their “masters.”

While nothing directly attributed to Vulca has survived, numerous remains of architectural terracottas have, and, perhaps, the preference for using them and not stone for public buildings in part led to Augustus's famous statement that "he could justly boast that he had found it [Rome] built of brick and left it in marble" (Suetonius *Augustus* 28.3; translation by Rolfe 1951: 267). Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 35.157–158) continues in the same passage about Vulca quoted above: "For these were the most splendid images of gods at that time; and we are not ashamed of those ancestors of ours for worshipping them in that material" (translation from Rackham 1952: 377). Here I would like to single out one literally small example: a gorgon antefix from Veii, dated c.510–500 BCE ([Figure 24.1](#)).³ Against a background of strigils with black interiors, a Gorgon stares out at us with a wide gaping mouth and tongue hanging out. Snakes, virtually all of which have lost their heads, encircle her face. Thus far she seems like most other gorgon antefixes. The major difference lies in her liveliness. As she cants her head to our right, every part of her seems to be in motion, from the extra ridges springing from her nose and surrounding her mouth to the writhing snakes and her furrowed brow. In particular the lack of stasis separates the best of Etruscan art from the best of Greek art.



Figure 24.1 Antefix in the form of a Gorgon's head, 510–500 BCE. Painted Terracotta.

From the Portonaccio Sanctuary, Veii. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, inv. sc. 2499. Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Etruscan Vase-Painting: The Micali Painter

Unlike the anonymous workers on building decorations, some Etruscan painters, like their Greek counterparts, signed their pots. Unfortunately, as

with the Greek vase painters, a signature is more an indication of the painter's (and perhaps the potter's) literacy than an indication of a vase's quality. Although Etruscans start signing their pots about the same time as the Greeks do, unlike some of the famous Greek vase-painters such as Exekias, no Etruscan signatures have survived on vases of great aesthetic worth. It is not that the Etruscans did not produce significant vases; it is just that they do not seem to have signed them. As a result, we must leave the realm of named Etruscan artists to examine specific objects that could only have been produced by someone who demonstrated by the quality of his works that he was an artist.

In particular the pottery workshop of the Micali Painter at Vulci exhibits a range in quality from the routine to the remarkable, the latter probably created by the head or lead artist of the workshop. For example, only a glance at a hydria in Florence, dated c.510–500 BCE ([Figure 24.2](#)), is needed to tell viewers that they are not looking at an Attic black-figure vase.⁴ The hydria is too colorful and emphasizes decorative “border” patterns far more than a “tasteful” contemporary Attic black-figure hydria would. A checkerboard pattern appears on the lip, a tricolor pattern between the handles above four rows of another checkerboard, and finally, below the figured scene, a comparatively standard line of lotus flowers and rays separated by single rows of dots. Even the main scene, interpreted as the “Introduction of Herakles to Olympus,” does not obey Greek rules. For the hero, Herakles, stands on the far left, not in the center as he “should,” and looks not toward his new companions, but completely off scene probably wondering where Athena is, because she is supposed to introduce him.⁵ So, while everyone waits for Athena, the gods are chatting with and gesturing at each other rather than poor Herakles. The scene most resembles the invitees to a wedding sitting around gossiping before the ceremony begins to the point that they do not realize the bride has entered. In other words, the Micali Painter brings myth down to earth by focusing on how people actually behave at formal ceremonies. On the shoulder of the hydria, four pairs of satyrs dance an elaborate “minuet” in which they severely arch their backs and gesture with arms and hands at virtual right angles. Even the three plants between the three left couples sway with the dancers' movements. Unlike the figures in the main scene, who have solid black bodies, as prescribed in Attic black-figure, the satyrs have gaps in the solid color that gives them a restless quality akin to that of the Veii antefix. Finally, the youths moving to the right on the neck are stock figures.



Figure 24.2 Black-figure hydria by the Micali Painter, 515–500 BCE.

From Vulci. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana – Firenze.

Creating New Representations of Greek Myths and Etruscan Legends

While the Micali Painter had chosen a Greek story for his main scene and depicted it almost, but not quite, in the way a Greek artist would have, other

Etruscan artists depicted Greek stories never represented in Greek art (see also [Chapter 26](#)). One of the best examples is that of Pasiphae cuddling her baby, the Minotaur, in the tondo of an early fourth century BCE kylix by the Settecamini Painter now in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles inv. no. 1066; Brendel 1978: 344, fig. 268). If Etruscan artists could create “Greek” scenes without models, then they must have been able to represent scenes from their own “history” that would never have been depicted by any Greek artist. The stories surrounding the Vibenna brothers exemplify the process. Aulus and Caeles Vibenna were active in the sixth century BCE, but did not appear in scenes on Etruscan objects until the fourth century BCE. Their most notable appearance is in the François Tomb in Vulci where Mastarna (probably Servius Tullius) frees them from their captors (Sgubini Moretti 2004; also see [Chapter 25](#)). The story, composed of five two-figured groups, takes up an entire long wall and wraps around to the two abutting walls on the left and right. Because the figures are labeled, we have no doubt that we are dealing with an Etruscan story. Perhaps just as importantly the scene on the long wall opposite it is the Sacrifice of the Trojan Prisoners by Achilles after the death of Patrocles – a Greek tale from the *Iliad*. In other words, as has been pointed out before, the two scenes give equal weight to Greek and Etruscan legendary history or, perhaps in their terms, to historical events. The Vibennae ambush Cacus(s), an Etruscan seer, on a fourth century BCE Etruscan mirror and on a series of late Etruscan funerary urns (Small 1982). Again, the inscriptions on the mirror are crucial to identifying who the participants are and removing the scene from any possible Greek interpretation. The Etruscan artists who created these types did not make them up out of whole cloth, but adapted existing models to suit their new purposes. When Greek artists did this – and they did do it, e.g., when a Greek vase painter took the pose of Aristogeiton, one of the Tyrannicides, and repurposed it for Theseus – no scholar accuses that artist of lacking creativity. Instead the tendency is to marvel at the re-use and to comment on how that re-use expands one’s understanding of the adapted figure.⁶ When the Etruscans do the same thing, the works are generally examined primarily for how they “misunderstood” their models rather than as creatively going beyond the model to make something new.

Similarly, the terracotta pediment from Talamone, dated to the mid-second century BCE, ([Figure 24.3](#)) with the Seven against Thebes – a Greek subject – is considered to be based on some lost Greek original whose existence we know about only from a single short reference in Pausanias (9.4.2).⁷ He mentions two paintings in the Temple of Athena at Plataea of which the one by Onasias, an artist otherwise unknown, was of Adrastus attacking Thebes. Since the other painter mentioned is Polygnotus, the painting probably dates to the fifth century BCE, about two centuries earlier than the pediment at Talamone. Yet even a cursory examination of the pediment confirms the Hellenistic date from the style to the action of the figures to the pathos of the

blind Oedipus kneeling front and center. In other words, even if one surmounts the logistics of an Etruscan artist going to Plataea for inspiration or even indirectly having a “faithful” reproduction of it near at hand, the style of the pediment and, in particular, the remarkable feat of fitting over 20 figures and two quadrigas, as well as the attack on the city walls within a triangular area, make it far more likely that the artist designed the scene specifically with the pediment in mind. In turn, the pediment served as a model for the three major Hellenistic centers for making funerary urns – Chiusi, Volterra, and Perugia – each of which excerpted different sections (Small 1981: 167–169).

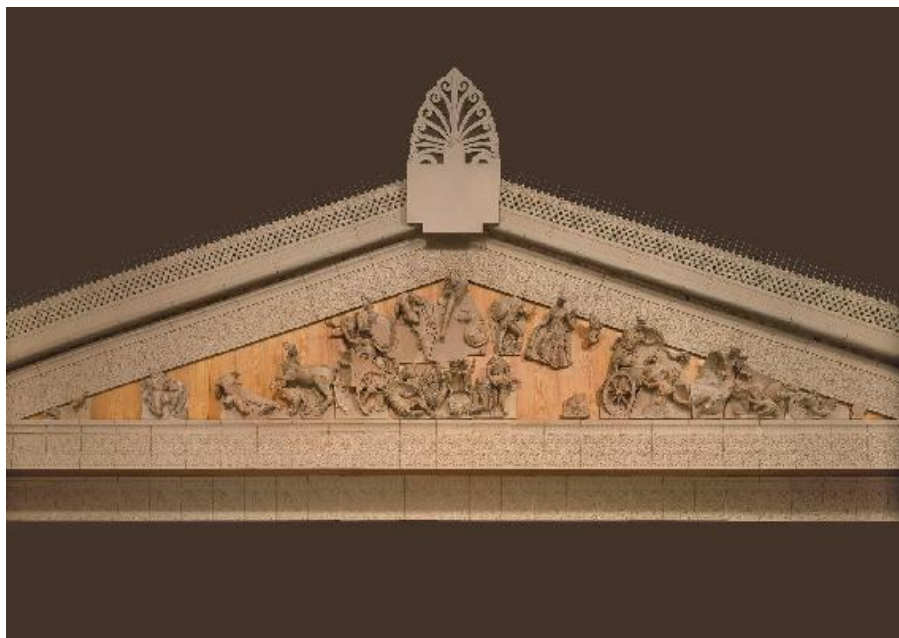


Figure 24.3 Temple pediment with relief depicting the Seven against Thebes, second quarter of the second century BCE. Terracotta.

From Talamone. Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Monumental Painting

While no one disputes that the Etruscans adopted the technique of black-figure from the Greeks, monumental wall painting presents a more complex and difficult case (see also [Chapter 17](#)). Underlying many of the scholarly arguments is the idea that it is unthinkable for the Etruscans to be ahead of the Greeks in any artistic area. Even entirely Etruscan tombs, such as the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing at Tarquinia (see [Figure 17.2](#)), are said to have been painted by Greeks (for a recent example, Steingraber 2006: 281). Scholars for the most part discount that Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 35.17–18), like

his contemporary Quintilian, acknowledged that painting in Italy was equal in age and quality to that of the Greeks:

For the art of painting had already been brought to perfection even in Italy. At all events there survive even today in the temples at Ardea paintings that are older than the city of Rome ... There are pictures surviving at Caere that are even older. And whoever carefully judges these works will admit that none of the arts [*artium*] reached full perfection more quickly

(translation from Rackham 1952: 273).

Two points are important here. First, scholars again try to have it both ways. They trust Pliny when he writes about Greek painters and sculptors, but then ignore him when he gives equal credit to the Etruscans and the Romans. Second, the idea that two cultures could independently develop related techniques – something that Pliny implies – is not considered. Yet the material evidence reflects a different story, one that agrees with Pliny. The earliest decorated tombs appeared in southern Etruria at Veii and Caere in the first half of the seventh century BCE. Two things about them are notable: their number and their crudity. If the Etruscans were following an established model, they would have been able to skip this experimental stage. Instead they spent most of that century trying different methods until they found one that worked (Naso 2010). Moreover, Robert Leighton (2005) argues that the decoration on the earlier Villanovan hut urns displays the roots of inspiration for painting the tombs.

For an example of Etruscan painting more or less contemporary to the Micali Painter, we can consider the chariot race in the Tomb of the Olympic Games at Tarquinia (Figure 24.4, Plate Section). It, too, takes a so-called Greek subject and portrays it in an Etruscan fashion. While “Olympic” is a modern misnomer, the games represented in this tomb range from the Etruscan “Game of Phersu” to those shared with the Greeks like running, long jumping, throwing the discus, and a chariot race. Four two-horse chariots race to the left on the left wall of the tomb (Scheffer 2003: 48 fig. 1 and 56–7 table 1 no. 4; Steingraber 1985: pls. 123–124 and 333 no. 92 with full description and bibliography). The long horizontal space allowed the Etruscan artist to capture the climax of a race. The lead chariot, on the far left, has begun to distance itself from the pack and its charioteer is not actively using his whip to urge his horses on, but he does look back over his shoulder to see that his nearest competitor is rapidly falling behind. The third chariot’s horses overlap the second chariot’s entire chariot-box. Both of these charioteers are intent on whipping their horses. The fourth and last chariot has totally come a cropper. One of the horses has fallen onto its back with its legs tangled in the reins, while the other horse rears up. The chariot itself is upside down, as the position of the wheel on top shows, while the charioteer is flying through the air. That the scene gets more and more tightly packed toward its rear on the

right reflects the bunching up that occurs during a real race. In short, this artist depicts not just the basic elements of any good race but also manages to convey the speed at which it takes place as well as the individual racers' actions. It also has that Etruscan feel of capturing an action in the midst of its occurrence like a movie still rather than at a point of stasis like a Greek representation.



Figure 24.4 Chariot race on the left wall of the Tomb of the Olympic Games, c.510 BCE. Fresco. From Tarquinia.

Photo: By permission of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

Technical Marvels

The Etruscans also excelled in making jewelry (see further, [Chapter 19](#)). While the technique of granulation – infinitesimally small beads of gold – was invented in the Near East, no ancient culture surpassed the Etruscans in its use, and even today it is rarely equaled (Nestler and Formigli 2010; see also [Figure 19.3](#)). In other words, this is one of the best examples of the Etruscans exceeding their teachers in a particular skill. While we may admire the skill in the use of granulation, it is the artist's overall design of the Lion Fibula from the Regolini-Galassi Tomb at Cerveteri, dated to c.675–650 BCE, that makes the piece more than a technical marvel.⁸ In the center of the disk five lions parade in two rows. The top two lions face each other and on the bottom the two end lions face outward with the middle lion moving to the left, the dominant direction in Etruscan art (Small 1987). Otto Brendel (1978: 57–58)

decries the “apparent lack of rules” in the Orientalizing period, to which the Lion Fibula belongs: the lions “tread the ground rather insecurely; as if the artist were not yet quite convinced of the necessity of a firm base line.” Although Brendel accurately describes the lions, he misunderstands what the Etruscan artist was trying to achieve. The very way the lions are placed indicates that the artist was not attempting a realistic portrayal but was interested in pattern and design. Adding ground lines for the top two lions would not only look awkward, but also destroy the balance between filled and empty space. This central group in turn is surrounded by two decorated borders of linked palmettes separated by a plain band. While the repoussé used for the disk is well done, it is the granulation arranged in a zigzag pattern on the crossbars that is amazing. The arc combines both techniques with seven rows of 55 three-dimensional birds parading lengthwise and separated by griffins on the substrate in repoussé with both sets detailed in granulation.

“Portraits”

The Greeks had only a limited interest in capturing the personalities of specific people, because they preferred types. Homer, a poet, is blind with a full beard. A ruler, generally beardless, has a stern expression with a knit brow. A philosopher is bearded. The Greeks make only formal portraits, never candid. While the Etruscans, like the Greeks, did use standard body types, they often portrayed individualized features (see also [Chapter 18](#)), as can be seen when comparing groups of portraits from family tombs from the Hellenistic period.

Late Etruscan funerary urns consist of a lid with a reclining figure on top of a cask often decorated with a figural scene. Some of these figures – and, no doubt, most of those in terracotta – are not distinctive. Others, however, seem to have been ordered sufficiently in advance to portray actual faces and specific scenes on the casks.⁹ When Catullus (39.11) referred to the “obesus Etruscus,” he knew what he was talking about (cf. [Chapters 22](#) and [25](#)). For example, a white limestone sarcophagus from the Partunu Tomb in Tarquinia and dated to the end of the fourth century BCE shows a man stretched out on the lid with his slightly raised head supported by his left hand (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: figs. 247 below and 248 with p. 149). His rolls of fat are amply displayed, because his drapery does not start until below the navel. He has a squarish, rather full face with an aquiline nose, somewhat raised eyebrows, and knit brow. His lips firmly set together with the downward turn to his mouth impart more an air of dissatisfaction than of complacency. While the practice of putting specific heads on top of generic bodies continued among the Romans and may seem strange today, its later revival in our own era should not be forgotten.¹⁰

Etruscan Style

Perhaps the most telling trait of an artist and a culture is style. While today an artist has a smorgasbord of styles and cultures to choose from, in antiquity models were far less varied, and rarely did an individual artist produce a strikingly different object. Such is the case, however, with the artists – and I do mean plural – who made the “skinny figurines,” as they are called today. From this group, which began in the Archaic period, I have selected a single example ([Figure 24.5](#)) as the epitome of the melding of Etruscan and Greek forms and as worthy of the term “Art” as any Greek object (Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Br. 321; from the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, Nemi; c.350 BCE. Cristofani 1985: 173 [color photographs], 273–74 no. 67). If one focuses on the head and the feet of this bronze statuette, one sees a fairly typical fourth-century BCE Classical Greek head of a woman with her wavy hair parted in the middle and topped by a tiara. She has a roughly triangular face with a straight nose and eyes set within heavy lids. Her feet are shod in typical pointed Etruscan shoes. Thus far she looks like any number of statuettes of women until one looks at her body, which is a long, narrow, unadorned plank that tapers down from her shoulders to a slight flare to indicate the hem of her garment just above her shoes. Her arms are pressed against her body and extend to mid-thigh, as they should, with two knobs for her knees about halfway down from the end of her hands and her feet. Balancing the knees are two similar small knobs for her breasts. From a side view she is even more dramatic, because both her head and feet jut out from her exceedingly narrow body with a slight protrusion for her buttocks matched on the front by her knees. The artist has combined a Classical Greek head with an abstract Etruscan body to produce one of the most elegant works of art to have survived from antiquity. Such pieces were long neglected by scholars, in part because they considered them abominations that adhered to neither the Greek standard nor an abstract one, like the Cycladic idols imitated by Brancusi. Instead they meld two major artistic styles – a modern abstract style with Greek Classical forms – to create an entirely different kind of work not seen before or after the Etruscans.



Figure 24.5 Statuette of a woman, c.350 BCE. Bronze.

From the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, Nemi. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Br. 231. Photo: © 2015. White Images/Scala, Florence.

4. Conclusion

In this brief consideration of Etruscan artists, I have tried to demonstrate that the objects they created are every bit as worthy of the appellation “art” as

anything made by acknowledged Greek artists. That we know the name of only one artist should not affect our judgment. In fact the absence of named artists may allow scholars to judge Etruscan works on their own merits rather than on the reputations of their makers in antiquity. Scholars who study Greek art have been plagued for over a century by the “name game.” Olga Palagia (2010: 103) succinctly sums up the approach that dates to Adolf Furtwängler’s *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture* published in 1893:

the underlying principle being, **this is so beautiful, it must be classical, and was probably made by someone we have heard of** [sic]. This principle continued to be in force even in the late twentieth century, a case in point being the *Riace bronzes*, which are constantly being attributed to any number of old masters merely on account of their excellence.

At the same time the works of twentieth-century artists did not just challenge our ideas of what art should be like, but actually changed the way we look at objects and hence what we consider to be art. Pieces like the Louvre bronze statuette are admired now in part because a twentieth-century artist, Giacometti, admired and used them as an inspiration for his own sculptures. In short, Etruscan artists should be seen as masters of technique (granulation), innovators in iconography (new versions of Greek myths and entirely new representations of their own stories), and creators of new styles (combining the Greek classical ideal with the Etruscan abstract).

Abbreviations

BAD

Beazley Archive Database: <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/XDB/ASP/default.asp>;

LE²

Pallottino, M. 1968. *Testimonia Linguae Etruscae*. 2nd edn. Florence.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Two articles have examined aspects of this topic in more detail: Small 1991/92 was one of the first to look at “The Etruscan View of Greek Art” with detailed examples; Izzet 2007 delves into the historiography behind the denigration of Etruscan art in British scholarship. Haynes 2000 is the best one-volume introduction to the Etruscans in all their aspects. Platt and Squire 2010 contains nine articles devoted to the problem of “art” in classical antiquity as well as recent bibliography on the topic. Ridgway 2010 incisively and clearly presents the case for the pivotal importance of the Etruscans in understanding both the Greeks and the Romans. Ross et al. 2008 is a catalogue to a major exhibit of Etruscan art with excellent introductory essays as well as extensive photographic documentation. Torelli 2001 is a catalogue of an Italian blockbuster exhibition of Etruscan art with essays on most aspects of the Etruscans and their art.

NOTES

- ¹ Due to the limitations on space and photographs, I can discuss only a handful of examples to illustrate the range of artists in media and over time. For each “object” I give at least one published and/or online reference as well as the customary information about provenience and current location. I am grateful to A. A. Donohue, Lisa Pieraccini, and Susan Woodford for their astute comments.
- ² From Populonia, now Florence PD66. *BAD* 21394 with bibliography; attributed by Beazley: *TLE*² 60 no. 370. The sherd has been the subject of much speculation ranging from the postulation of an Attic red-figure workshop in Vulci that imported its clay from Athens to the simpler idea,

which I support, of an Etruscan painter working in Athens. For the former idea, see Gill 1987.

- 3 Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. no. VEX 04. Torelli and Sgubini 2008: 204 no. 12.1 (with bibliography) and color photograph on cover. Torelli and Sgubini (2008: 204) also illustrate five other antefixes from the same building. Sprenger and Bartoloni (1983: 111, pl. 117) assign this piece to the “Master of the Apollo of Veii” (their quotation marks).
- 4 Florence, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. no. 4139, from Pitigliano; see Spivey 1987: 21 no. 126 with pls. 22a–b, 23a, and 40a; Torelli and Sgubini 2008: 36 (color photograph) and 241 no. 143 (with bibliography).
- 5 Although the female figure who stands next to Herakles on the right has sometimes been identified as Athena, she has none of Athena’s attributes. At the very least she should wear a helmet like Mars (second from the right) and perhaps carry a spear. Instead she merely holds a piece of vegetation like the other two female figures. For the identification as Athena, see *Prima Italia* 1981: 139–40 no. 91 [E. Mangiani].
- 6 For Aristogeiton: Roman copy in Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. no. G104 : Richter 1970: figs. 610–611. For Theseus fighting the wild sow: interior of a kylix by the Codrus Painter, London, British Museum, inv no. E 84; from Vulci, c.440–430 BCE; *BAD* 217213 (with photographs and bibliography).
- 7 Pediment: Ross et al. 2008: 76–77 (color photograph), 316 No. 293 (with bibliography); Torelli 2001: 264 (drawing), 266–269 (color photograph).
- 8 Vatican, Museo Etrusco Gregoriano, inv. no. 669. Height = 31.5 cm; width = 24 cm; see Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: pl. 18 (color) with p. 79 with bibliography; Cristofani and Martelli 1983: 97 no. 32 (color) and 262 no. 32; Buranelli and Sannibale 2003: 57 and 61–62 with excellent details.
- 9 As ever, scholars debate whether the distinctive heads are “true” portraits or merely types, and, if the former, whether they provide a model for the late Roman Republican veristic heads. As is probably clear, I believe that some of the Etruscan heads are sufficiently particular in details to be portraits and hence probably did provide a model for the Romans. That said, it must be kept in mind that rarely can one source alone be deduced for any particular phenomenon and I believe that is true also for Roman portraiture. It is a blend of influences combined with purely Roman traits.
- 10 Compare Trimble 2011. Horatio Greenough in 1840 sculpted a statue of George Washington, who sits half-draped like a latter-day Zeus (for a photograph and brief history of the statue: <http://www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu/objectdescription.cfm?ID=66>).

CHAPTER 25

Etruscan Bodies and Greek Ponderation

Anthropology and Artistic Form

Francesco deAngelis

1. Introduction

Defining the typical (or rather, stereotypical) physical features of the Etruscans has been a source of fascination since antiquity. One only has to think of Catullus's characterization of the *obesus Etruscus* (39.11) or of Vergil's *pinguis Tyrrhenus* (*Georgics* 2.193) which have found so much resonance in later ages and that have been used to label monuments such as some sarcophagi bearing figures with plump physical traits on their lids as "dell'Obeso"¹ (Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. no. 5482; Herbig 1952: 21–22 no. 21; van der Meer 2004: 120 no. H 21; and Tarquinia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. no. RC 9875, from the Partunus Tomb; Herbig 1952: 56–57 no. 107; van der Meer 2004: 140 no. H 107; see also Liébert 2006: 229–231; Bradley 2011: 25–26). Each era has shaped this interest in the Etruscan body according to its own conceptual categories and ideological biases (see [Chapter 22](#)). Even today, the fashionable obsession with DNA analyses in the hope to either shed light on the ancestors of the Etruscans or retrieve their alleged Tuscan descendants (e.g., Vernesi et al. 2004a, b; Belle et al. 2006; Achilli et al. 2007; Guimaraes et al. 2009) has comparable roots (Perkins 2009; Harari 2010; Sineo 2012; and [Chapter 13](#)). What links these cases together is the underlying assumption that Etruscan identity is something that can be determined and circumscribed, and that it has a tangible, biological basis in actual corporeality. Underscoring the problematic implications of this kind of endeavor may appear superfluous, especially given how often the risks of biological reductionism and cultural essentialism have been addressed and denounced in scholarship. Yet, since the very popularity of these themes is tightly related to the contemporary circumstances of our own world – in the first place, the profound changes in our understanding of human nature and in our ability to modify it, together with the consequent desire to isolate stable reference points – the possibility of adopting perspectives that are inadvertently conditioned by our own anxieties should not be discounted lightheartedly.

Fortunately, science itself provides antidotes against its abuses. The analysis

of the skeletal remains contained in the terracotta sarcophagus of the Chiusine woman, Seianti Hanunia, now in the British Museum, has allowed scholars to “recover” her facial features and compare them to a visual image (Swaddling and Prag 2002). A comparison between the face of the old woman as reconstructed by the scientists and the sarcophagus portrait confirms the idealizing character of the latter. Needless to say, the natural sciences, despite their strong and sometimes essential contributions, are by no means the only available tool in this context. The constructed nature of visual representations of facial features and body types can be effectively gleaned through art historical analysis alone (nor should one forget that even the “real” face of Seianti Hanunia is, itself, the product of art – that branch of portraiture that is based on forensic techniques). Indeed, art historians have argued along these lines on many occasions. For example, the “artificiality” of obese bodies, such as those that typically occur on the Hellenistic funerary monuments from Chiusi (de Angelis 2015a) (Figure 22.4), becomes apparent when we contrast them with the earlier images of the so-called cinerary-statues, which come from the same area and belong to the same category of sepulchral art (Cristofani 1975). The plump features of the Chiusians on the third-century sarcophagi and urns do not occur on the monuments of their fellow citizens (and ancestors) of the fifth and fourth centuries, who, on the contrary, display well-trained torsos and idealized faces.

This shift is hardly the product of substantial changes in the physical appearances of the people of Chiusi. Quite remarkably, the faces and bodies within each group resemble each other much more than they do counterparts in the other group. As first suggested by Paul Zanker (1995: 136 and n. 52), and then extensively argued by Massimiliano Papini (2004: 319–28), the chubby faces and the round bellies found on the Hellenistic monuments were inspired by the royal portraiture of the Ptolemies. They represent a transposition and adaptation of the Greek ideals of *tryphé* and opulence into the Etruscan context. Likewise, the earlier funerary images of the Chiusians are heavily indebted to Classical Greek forms and ideals, as has been demonstrated by Mauro Cristofani (1975), Tobias Dohrn (1982: 49–50), and Adriano Maggiani (1993). The overall shapes of the faces, with their oval contours, regular profiles, broad surfaces, sharp horizontal eyebrows, and fleshy lips, closely resemble the features found in Greek sculpture from the fifth century. Even the arrangement and texture of the locks of hair presuppose “Polykleitan” formulae as they survive in Roman copies. In both cases, then, formal analysis reminds us that represented bodies, be they realistic or idealized in style, are, first and foremost, constructs that vary according to cultural conventions and assumptions rather than biological factors. With respect to portraiture, the desire to take advantage of the formal solutions invented in Greece prevailed over any other considerations.

Originality vs. Derivation

While an art historical approach based on stylistic and formal analysis can effectively help scholars avoid the pitfalls of biological determinism when talking about Etruscan bodies, the situation is less clear-cut when it comes to cultural essentialism. The way in which the issue of identity has most often been conceptualized in discussions about the relationship of Etruscan art to Greek art reminds us that art historians can be just as prone to stereotypes as anyone else. The conceptual couple of “originality vs. derivation” is particularly insidious in this respect: while it represents a useful heuristic tool if used judiciously, it nevertheless risks becoming an end in itself – even today.

There is no doubt, for example, that artifacts like the canopic urns from Chiusi (Gempeler 1973; Cristofani 1978: 123–27; Minetti 2004; Paolucci 2010) express a conception of the body that cannot be directly related to anything known from Greece. Their “bodies,” which are, in fact, the containers of the ashes of the deceased (with the heads functioning as the lids), never conceal their nature as vessels, despite the addition of anthropomorphizing elements. The heads – both the highly schematized and cork-like ones on the earliest examples, and the more naturalistic types of later decades – follow their own conventions and develop largely according to criteria internal to the genre: it would, in fact, be difficult to trace stylistic connections to other artistic traditions. These images are truly Etruscan, or, more accurately, Chiusine inventions. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, the over-elongated bronze statuettes from Hellenistic Volterra, including the famous *Ombra della Sera* (Cristofani 1985a: 275 no. 75; M. Bonamici in Maggiani 1985b: 158, 163–65 nos. 218–19; Cateni 1999), presuppose aesthetic ideals that also cannot be found anywhere else in the coeval Mediterranean world. Even though isolated details such as the arrangement of the hair have parallels in Greek art (and can be used to date the statuettes), the overall result is so peculiar that it is difficult to consider them as just a variant of a more widespread visual *koine*.

It would be misleading, however, to accord privileged status to these particular examples, or to argue that their undisputable originality and uniqueness make them more “authentic” than other manifestations of Etruscan concepts about the body. The style of the vast majority of Etruscan representations of human figures manifests clear responses – very often imitative ones – to stimuli coming from Greek art. There is little doubt that these stimuli were the objects of creative engagement in Etruria, as a well-known statue such as the Aplu of Veii easily shows. The days are long gone when the Aplu was understood as a paradigmatic example of “Etruscan-ness.” Following Massimo Pallottino’s (1945) seminal analysis, scholars tend to stress the unique quality of its workmanship (e.g., Cristofani 1978: 100–102; Torelli 1985: 97–102; Colonna 2008: 59–62) rather than the peculiarly

Etruscan nature of its forms (as did Kaschnitz Weinberg 1933; but see also Brendel 1978: 238–44). The emphasis, however, still lies on the transformative process. This is to say that to a certain extent the Greek component has been taken for granted: stylistic parallels have been used mostly to trace artistic “influences” and assess chronologies, but have not been subjected to a systematic critical discussion. Instead, the abundance of Greek comparanda for almost all aspects of the god’s body begs for an extensive explanation. On a general level, the anthropomorphic rendering of divinities in Etruria, whose theological system does not seem *a priori* to require it, is a far from obvious phenomenon that still awaits an articulated and comprehensive investigation (Cristofani 1993, 1997; Maggiani 2012; Krauskopf 2013: 517–520).

The underlying problem, therefore, is not that the canopic urns or the elongated bronze statuettes are representative in only a limited way of Etruscan tendencies concerning bodily ideals. More fundamentally, it is the “originality vs. derivation” dichotomy that risks polarizing the perspective in a way that does not help to formulate productive questions, let alone provide answers to them. The emphasis on this conceptual binary is, at least in part, the consequence of a traditional art historical approach (see [Chapter 24](#)). To counter such risks, it may be worthwhile to take on the challenge issued by many scholars who, in recent years, have advocated going beyond art history in the direction of a more comprehensive science of images (a *Bildwissenschaft*) and/or an anthropology of art. For the purposes of this chapter, it is particularly significant that the human body, as both an object and a medium of aesthetic experience, plays a key role in many of these new scholarly trends. This focus has been fruitful in several ways: among other things, it has led scholars to revive former approaches and theories, from empathy studies and Warburg’s *Pathosformeln* to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, and to revisit them in the light of the new insights brought about by fields such as the neurosciences.

The perspectives advocated by these approaches are not only quite diverse but also even divergent from each other. It makes little sense to harmonize them at all costs, let alone subscribe to all their points. Moreover, the adoption of a broader anthropological perspective does not require that art historical phenomena such as form and style be marginalized. On the contrary, they should be firmly placed at the very core of these endeavors. Despite what some of its proponents seem to imply, an anthropology of art does not stand in opposition to art history, and, in any case, does not require relegating traditional methods to the storeroom of out-of-fashion tools, provided we properly redefine them. The point, in other words, is not to deny the aesthetic dimension of art, but to assess its *Sitz im Leben*, its “setting-in-life,” for a culture as distant and alien to ours as the Etruscans’.

2. Ponderation

The heuristic potential of an anthropological approach of this kind can be made evident through the examination of a paradigmatic formal phenomenon, ponderation, and its representation in Etruscan art from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Ponderation – the distribution of the body weight on the legs and the series of reactions and movements that it provokes in the rest of the limbs – is particularly apposite for such an investigation not simply for its intrinsic significance, but also because it is a motif that mediates between iconography and style. In particular, it makes it possible to focus on the expressive dimension of iconography, which is crucial for an anthropological understanding of art.

The relevance of ponderation to the history of ancient art is beyond dispute. In fact, the distinction between the supporting and relaxed legs that causes the inclination of the hip axis and the curvature of the *linea alba* is perhaps the single most significant marker of the passage from the Archaic to the Classical period in Greek art (Borbein 1989; Hölscher 1997: 239–241; see also Fehr 1979). The use of ponderation brought the series of the *kouroi* to an end and gave way to a new typology for standing statues. The dynamic potential inherent within the human body was no longer suggested by features like the different positioning of the feet – one advanced and the other postponed – but by the whole body's reaction to the force of gravity. Because of ponderation, even figures that stood still, without movement, did not appear static. The change was apparently a slight one, but it had momentous consequences on the visual power of human representations, as a comparison between the late *kouros* depicting Aristodikos (Karouzos 1961) and an early statue in the new style such as the so-called Kritios Boy (Fehr 1979: 25–30; Hurwit 1989) easily demonstrates. The subtle deviation from strict symmetry in the latter's left and right parts of the body gives him a pervasive vibrancy that is fundamentally different from the powerful but more rigid manifestation of self-controlled energy in the statue of Aristodikos.

Just as remarkable are the conceptual and artistic presuppositions of its invention. Ponderation was connected to a strong interest in the internal working of the human body and in the dynamic aspects of its anatomy. Even though the specific nature of the link between sculpture and coeval developments in medical research is the subject of scholarly debate, ponderation offers testimony to the clinical eye with which artists observed the human body and how they paid attention not only to its outer appearance but also to its underlying causes (Leftwich 1995; Métraux 1995; Demand 2001; Neer 2010: 143–55). The variety of situations that Greek artists envisaged for ponderation within a relatively restricted time span suggests the intensity of their interest in this motif (Borbein 1997: 1293–1301), from the poised and seductive elegance of the Motya charioteer (Rolley 1994: 389–391; Pavese 1996; Denti 1997; Neer 2010: 143–45) to the impaired

movements of the wounded Amazons of Ephesos (Bol 1995).

As is well-known, ponderation achieved its – literally – canonical version thanks to Polykleitos, who synthesized his vision of it in the famous chiasmic construction (the contrapposto) of the Doryphoros (see Beck et al. 1990, especially Berger 1990 and von Steuben 1990; Moon 1995, especially Tobin 1995; Borbein 1996, 1997: 1293–1298; Hölscher 1997: 246–48). Polykleitos investigated and visualized the consequences of the movement of the legs in every single part of the body through a complex play of reactions and counter-reactions. Thus, in the Doryphoros, the deviation of the line of the hips from horizontality triggers a similar, but opposite, deviation of the shoulders; and the head looks slightly down in the direction of the supporting leg. Tense limbs and relaxed ones are set in a cross relationship to each other: the supporting right leg finds correspondence in the left arm that holds the spear; similarly, the left leg, with its raised heel, is relaxed just as the right arm is. At the same time, both left limbs of the Doryphoros are flexed, whereas the right ones are straightened. Polykleitos's quest for a pervasive balance of movements was combined with the establishment of a rigorous system of ideal proportions that determined the dimensions of each of the body parts – a system that the artist had put down in writing in his treatise, the *Canon*, which was also the name given to the statue (Philipp 1990; Borbein 1994; Pollitt 1995).

3. The Reception of Ponderation in Etruria

Scholarship has characteristically phrased the issue of the reception of ponderation in Etruria as a study of the echoes of Polykleitos and other Greek artists in Etruscan art. This research, conducted especially by Tobias Dohrn (1982: 27–34) and János Gjörgy Szilágyi (1993), has brought together a corpus of works mainly consisting of small-scale decorative bronze statuettes as well as votive images. For the most part, these artifacts are characterized by the shift of the hips corresponding to the distinction between supporting and relaxed leg, and by the converging lines of hips and shoulders. As both Dohrn and Szilágyi have remarked, however, these are all partial imitations of Polykleitos's model: we never find a systematic and organic adoption of the Greek artist's principles, some of which are only seldom attested in Etruria. For example, we positively know of only few instances of the motif of the raised heel (*uno crure insistere*, as Pliny the Elder describes it: *Natural History* 34.56), e.g., the statuette of a discus-bearer, now in Basel (Dohrn 1982: 30–31 no. 8, pl. 13). The body axis of this figure, however, is inclined in a way that would not warrant balance and stability if transposed into reality, thereby going against Classical ideals.

The question is whether this piecemeal adoption of Polykleitan elements is

really surprising –or disappointing, for that matter. The problem depends, in the first place, on the use of an art historical approach that focuses on the individual personalities of great masters. Such an approach, while far from inadequate for understanding certain aspects of Greek art (since ultimately it has its roots in the self-perception of the Greek artists themselves (Settis 1993; Tanner 2006; de Angelis 2015b)), is of limited value when employed as a comprehensive hermeneutic paradigm for most artistic cultures of antiquity – including the Greek one. The Etruscan sculptors and painters, whose professional self-consciousness and socio-cultural status only partially coincided with that of their Greek colleagues (Colonna 1975; Pfiffig 1976; Maggiani 1985a; Colonna 1993; Poccetti 2009; Colonna 2014; for Greece, see Coarelli 1980), did not aim to reproduce the characters of single personalities (e.g., Polykleitos, Pheidias, etc.) as such, nor were they particularly interested in the overall coherence and unity of the output of any Greek artists. Instead, the work of their colleagues must have been largely anonymous for them – they must have used it as a repertoire of available artifacts and formal options rather than considering it the sum of contributions and solutions invented by distinct famous individuals.

The Adoption of Classical Style in Etruria

Regardless of the issue of the great masters, the way in which scholars have conceptualized the reception of Classical art in Etruria has played a crucial role in predetermining the answers in a more general sense. The two main factors that have repeatedly attracted attention in this respect are the time lag with which the Etruscans adopted elements of Classical art and reacted to them, and the lack of organicity inherent within Etruscan works of art. The first factor – retardation (*Retardierung*: see *Die Aufnahme* 1981) – has been linked to the political and economic crisis experienced by Etruria, especially by its southern coastal cities, in the wake of its defeat in the naval battle against the Cumaeans and the Syracusans in 474 BCE. Even though both the chronological extent and the specific dynamics of this time lag have been debated, consensus remains about its existence during the decades around the mid-fifth century, i.e., the periods of the Severe and High Classical styles in Greece. As for the allegedly missing organicity of Etruscan art in comparison with its Greek sources of inspiration, this view has been mainly understood in terms of cultural difference and specificity – most famously by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1942) – as an expression of the anti-classical attitude of the Etruscans (see Papini 2002). In his book on the “Interim age,” Tobias Dohrn (1982) combined both factors in a single explanation, arguing that the interruption of direct contacts with mainland Greece caused by the post-474 crisis allowed Etruscan artists to let their deep nature, their “true” self, emerge relatively unhindered by Classical Greek influences, and to give way to their

inborn tendencies toward expressivity and decorativism. Even though the scholarly roots of Dohrn's ideas, which lie in Guido Kaschnitz von Weinberg's *Strukturforschung* and share its problematic assumptions about artistic ethnicity (Brendel 1979: 108–21; Wimmer 1997), make it difficult to maintain his point of view unaltered, his explanatory model has not yet been replaced with a fundamentally different one.

The point here is not to avoid any pejorative implications of the acknowledgement that the Etruscans adopted and adapted Classical Greek art only in a partial way: most of the studies of this phenomenon are anyway keen to provide a decidedly positive evaluation of the Etruscans' achievements. The problem lies in the conceptual constellation they use, which is basically unchanged in all cases and, as mentioned above, does not allow one to escape from a dichotomic vision (Classical vs. anti-Classical; organic vs. non-organic; meaningful vs. decorative; and of course, original vs. derivative). By focusing on the specific Etruscan contribution, this vision takes the Greek components for granted, as if the fact that they were adopted were the norm, an obvious phenomenon, and that what requires explanation – or, what is interesting – were only the changes they underwent. Ultimately, such a vision is pervaded by a classicizing attitude equal to the approaches that condemned Etruscan art on the account of its divergences from the Greek models. It implies that the spread of Greek art beyond its original boundaries is something natural, even inevitable (compare [Chapter 7](#) on the “Classicistic” bias).

Instead, we should start with the assumption that intercultural transmission is always partial and circumscribed. If we insist on understanding acculturation as a totalizing and overarching phenomenon, we will never find it instantiated in reality (Flaig 1999). This is also true for cultures like that of the Romans, where the desire to imitate and replicate Greek prototypes was much more pronounced and produced properly classicizing trends; and it is all the more true for the Etruscans, whose attitude towards Greek art provides us with the unique opportunity to assess the impact of Classical art in absence of any classicizing ideologies. In other words, if we want to understand Etruscan art – and Etruscan notions of the body – we should not simply pay attention to their differences from the Greeks, but rather, and perhaps especially, to those elements in them that we recognize as “Greek.” What made these motifs so distinctively Greek and, at the same time, so easily translatable into other visual cultures?

With respect to ponderation, the implicit expectation of a thorough, organic adoption of Greek formal features leads us to disregard the much more interesting phenomenon that Etruscan artists not only took over this motif (along with some types of contrapposto stances), but also used it extensively and engaged intensively with it. Indeed, ponderation appears in decorative and votive sculpture of small and medium size, as well as in life-size statues (e.g.,

the so-called “Mars” from Todi: Roncalli 1973) and in architectural sculpture (e.g., the torso of a young man from the temple of Via S. Leonardo in Orvieto: Sprenger and Bartoloni 1977: 139 no. 194). Moreover, it was used in several different ways that vary with the passing of time, following the developments of both Greek and Etruscan art. For example, votive statuettes of the Hellenistic age (e.g., Haynes 1985: 321 no. 197; or De Puma 2013: 235 no. 6.79) employ ponderation in combination with an accentuated rotation of the body and more broadly-spaced legs, creating an elastic movement that shows awareness of late Classical and early Hellenistic inventions.

The sustained popularity of ponderation in Etruria is remarkable and requires an explanation, since its invention in Greece was the outcome of specific historical, cultural, and artistic circumstances. Tonio Hölscher (1997: 239–248) has connected it with the Greek experience of the Persian Wars and the new sense of the self that it triggered: according to him, the attentive analysis of the potentialities as well as of the limits of human action is an interest that sculptors and painters shared with other cultural actors of this age, such as philosophers and tragedians. As illuminating as explanations such as this one may be, the prolonged life of ponderation throughout antiquity, along with its diffusion in very different cultural contexts, suggests that much more is at stake. In other words, attention should shift from production to reception. This shift does not imply that the circumstances under which the motif was originally conceived lose their importance. Rather, they get relativized – in a quite literal (and positive) sense: that is, they are put in *relationship* to subsequent historical developments and thereby acquire sharper contours. Thus, the history of reception is useful precisely because – and insofar as – it sheds light on the beginnings of ponderation as well as on its use in the later periods.

4. Ponderation in the François Tomb

The François Tomb in Vulci provides a paradigmatic confirmation of this perspective. As is well-known, two remarkable scenes stand out among its many frescoes: one represents Achilles sacrificing the Trojan prisoners, and the other depicts Avle Vipinas with his comrades killing a group of adversaries that have captured Avle’s brother Caile Vipinas. These scenes unfold along the two long walls of the tomb’s so-called “tablinum” and continue around the edges on the two sides of the back wall flanking the door that leads to the rear chamber. The latter portions of both scenes are apparently marginal ([Figure 25.1](#)). In fact, given their position inside the tomb, closest to its main axis and directly facing the entrance, they are among the first images that a visitor would see upon entering the space. Their mutual connection is underscored by the single nude figure that dominates each of

them – respectively, a Trojan prisoner and Caile Vipinas – and especially by the two shields that are represented close to the tomb’s door. Since both shields are only half visible, as if they were interrupted by the door itself, the viewer is almost invited to integrate each half with the corresponding one on the other side. Scholars have used this pendant composition as a key for interpreting the tomb’s iconography (Harari 2007; Menichetti 2014). The thematic analogy as well as the contrast between the Trojan prisoner, who is led to death with his hands tied on his back, and Caile Vipinas, who is about to be freed from captivity and whose hands are being unbound by his loyal companion Macstrna, is undeniable. What has gone unremarked so far, however, is that this contrast also finds expression in the body postures of the two characters.

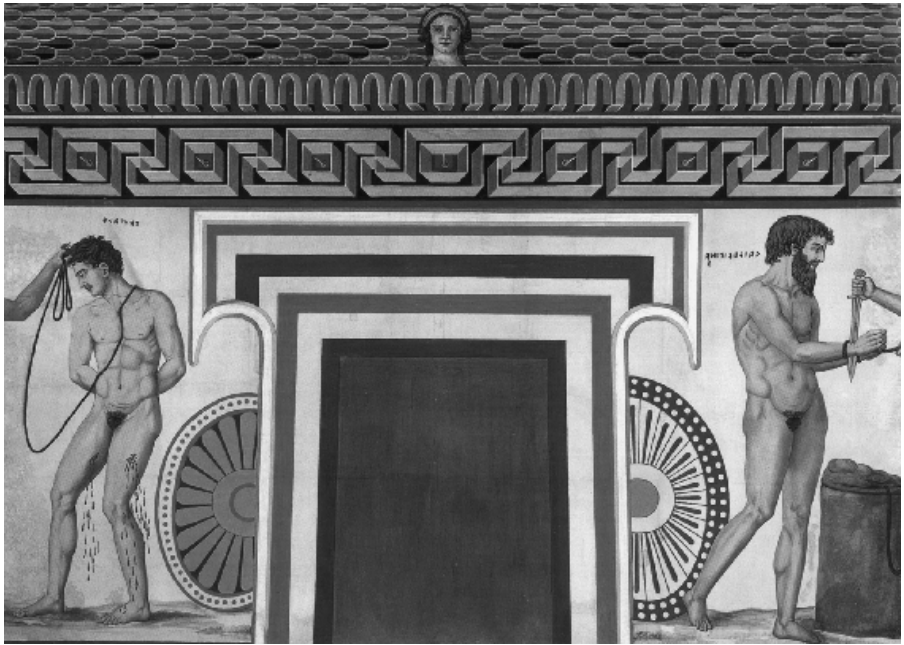


Figure 25.1 A Trojan prisoner and Caile Vipinas on the back wall of the François Tomb, 340–310 BCE. Fresco. From Vulci. Tempera painting by Carlo Ruspi. Drawing: Andreae et al. 2004, fig. 8.

The Trojan captive walks with an unsteady gait: his thighs have been deliberately mutilated and blood drips conspicuously down from his wounds. As a consequence, both of his knees are slightly bent. Similarly, the inclination of the Trojan’s head appears to be caused by Ajax Oileus who pulls at his hair. Everything in this figure speaks of impaired movement, diminished energy, and lack of control over the body. On the other side of the door, the opposite situation appears. The imprisonment of Caile Vipinas is about to end and the hero will recover his freedom of movement in a few seconds. It is not by chance, then, that Caile’s body is characterized by an

elegantly ponderated stance. Thanks to its connotation of dynamic corporeal autonomy, this posture is an ideal fit for the detailed rendering of Caile's anatomy, and, especially, the muscles of his torso and limbs, which are highlighted by a skillful use of chiaroscuro and white heightening. Even more remarkable is the way in which the Etruscan painter takes advantage of the character of ponderation as a posture that occupies a middle ground between standing and walking, just as Polykleitos did in the *Doryphoros*. This motif, which is further underscored by the elasticity of Caile's feet (they are set wider apart than usual), is particularly well-suited to capturing the transitional state, between captivity and freedom, of Caile himself: it is ponderation, above all, that lends his body a unique vibrancy that stands in marked contrast with the awkwardness of movement of the Trojan prisoner and most effectively incarnates the divergent destinies of the two characters. Thus, these images in the François Tomb provide a visual commentary on ponderation that illustrates both the Greek and the Etruscan sides of the phenomenon. In the painting of Caile, the artist took advantage of the dynamic potential that was intrinsic to the motif since its beginnings in the early Classical period and used it to confer visual meaning to an Etruscan legend by contrasting it with a representation of impaired movement in a Greek mythological scene that bears typical Etruscan traits, such as the Trojan prisoner's bleeding thighs.

5. Ponderation in Etruscan Bidimensional Art from the Late Classical Period

The François Tomb contains a particularly eloquent example of the use of ponderation in Etruscan art, but it is by no means the only one. A comprehensive overview would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, it is more productive to focus on one particular version of the phenomenon – one whose relationship to Greek Classical art is especially intense. I am referring to those instances that occur in bidimensional art where ponderation, not necessarily in its contrapposto version, is attributed to bodies that are visualized in full frontality, but in combination with a head shown in the profile. This is an iconographic scheme that we can legitimately dub as “Classical.” It first surfaces in the early Classical period in Greece, as manifested by the representation of Herakles on the krater of the Niobid Painter from Volsinii, (Orvieto) today in the Louvre (Beazley 1963: 601,22; Arias and Hirmer 1962: 355–356, fig. 173), where the hero is surrounded by comrades and looks towards Athena. In the Periklean age, it becomes a distinctive feature of artists such as the Achilles Painter: for example, on his namesake vase from Vulci (Beazley 1963: 987,1; Arias and Hirmer 1962: 364, fig. 188), it is used for Achilles who stands quietly with one hand on his

hip while resting on his spear; on his white-ground lekythoi, it appears in the poses of the deceased men positioned near their tomb or interacting with their relatives (e.g., Beazley 1963: 1000,21). The combination of calmness and energy in this formula seems to have been particularly appealing in a funerary context. It enjoyed considerable popularity in the early production of Attic sepulchral monuments (that is, in the last third of the fifth century) – such as on the famous “Cat Stele” from Salamis, an almost archetypical incarnation of the High Classical style (Clairmont 1993: no. 1.550; Neer 2010: 200–204, pl. 10).

Quite interestingly, this scheme is maintained and used in Etruria long after the end of the High Classical period, including on several mirrors from the fourth century. On an example from Caere, now in the British Museum (inv. no. 627: *ES* 4.398; van der Meer 1995: 109–11; de Angelis 2002: 69 and n. 78; de Grummond 2006: 93), where Menle/Menelaos is threatening to kill his wife Elinei/Helen after the fall of Troy but is restrained by Thethis/Thetis and Turan/Aphrodite (Figure 25.2), this version of ponderation appears in the figure of Aivas/Ajax. The hero is shown in full nudity, only wearing a mantle and bearing a shield and a spear in the left hand, while quietly observing the drama that unfolds on the left together with Phulphsna/Polyxena (but one wonders whether the engraver meant to refer to Cassandra). On the famous mirror from Tuscania with the haruspical inspection of the liver by Pava Tarchies (Figure 7.4), the god (or hero?) Veltune is represented in the same way (Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. no. 777759: Cristofani 1985b and 1987; Torelli 1988; Domenici 2009: 98–101, 107 [Tages 1]; Harari 2009). In this case, however, the general tone of the scene is much more calm and static. Perhaps, most famously, Hercle/Herakles is similarly rendered in the upper register of the mirror from Vulci (Figure 25.3), now in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, where the hero presents the winged infant Epiur to Tinia/Zeus in the presence of the two goddesses Turan and Thalna (inv. no. 1287: *ES* 2.181; Rebuffat-Emmanuel 1973: 51–64 no. 5; van der Meer 1995: 93–97; de Angelis 2002: 64–5 and n. 74; de Grummond 2006: 15, 61–3; Domenici 2009: 197–228, 229 (Epiur 1)). Hercle’s posture is not simply characterized by ponderation, but also has some significant contrapposto features, namely, the divergence of the axes of hips and shoulders, and the turn of the head in the direction of the supporting leg (it is not a full “Polykleitan” contrapposto, however, since both of his feet are planted on the ground and the left arm that should be hanging in a relaxed attitude carries Epiur instead).



Figure 25.2 Engraved mirror with Menelaos about to kill his wife Eleni after the fall of Troy, fourth century BCE. Bronze. From Caere. London, British Museum, inv. no. 627. Drawing: Gerhard, *ES* 4.398.



Figure 25.3 Engraved mirror with Hercle presenting Epiur to Tinia in the presence of Turan and Thalna, c.325. Bronze. From Vulci. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. no. 1287. Drawing: Gerhard, *ES* 2.181.

In addition to its use in mirror engravings, this formula appears in tomb paintings from the fourth century. On a wall of the Tomb of the Orcus in Tarquinia, for example, the three-headed monster Cerun/Geryon stands facing Aita/Hades and Phersipnei/Persephone in this posture (Steingraber 1985: 337–340 nos. 93–95, fig. 129; 2006: 207–210, fig. p. 199). Additional figures in the François Tomb employ it as well: both the Greater and the Lesser Aivas, each of whom holds a Trojan prisoner, are represented in this way (Steingraber 1985: fig. 183; Andreae et al. 2002: 192–193). The same probably applied to Achmemrun/Agamemnon, even though the loss of the inferior part of this

figure prevents certainty in this case.

How should the occurrences of this formula of early Classical origins on fourth-century Etruscan art objects, which, in most cases are of the highest quality, be conceptualized? As argued above, retardation is not a viable option. But speaking of conservatism or of “classicizing” formal trends would hardly be a satisfying explanation either, not only because the reception of Classical Greek art in Etruria lacks a systematic character, but also because the formula is employed in combination with others that have more recent stylistic origins.

A more suitable hermeneutic model appears to be the one developed for Roman art by Tonio Hölscher (1987) who argued that Greek historical styles, themes, and motifs received distinctive semantic charges in Roman times and were employed (and combined) accordingly to convey specific meanings and connotations by Roman artists. Thus, for example, on the Ara Pacis panel with the sacrifice of the Lavinian sow, Aeneas exudes classical *dignitas* and *gravitas* through the use of the iconographic formula also seen on the Etruscan mirrors and paintings discussed above. By contrast, the lower status of the attendant that leads the victim is indicated by, among other things, the use of Hellenistic realism for his features.

Despite the issues raised by a semiological approach to ancient art (on which, see below), Hölscher’s attempt is especially useful because it leads us to consider the actual interaction of different stylemes, motifs, and types rather than (just) their origins. Most crucially, it invites us to focus on the expressive dimension of iconography, which is crucial for an anthropological understanding of the role of the body in ancient art, as recent work on the Greek notion of *schema* has confirmed (see Catoni 2004). In the case of the classical formula of ponderation, it is significant that it is prevalently used for warriors and characters that carry or hold weapons of some kind. This circumstance suggests the artists’ desire to emphasize the physical prowess of the represented figures: not coincidentally are muscles often articulated with a wealth of detail, as can be seen in Aivas and Hercle on the two mirrors discussed above (see [Figures 25.2](#) and [25.3](#)) – and as it already occurs on the Niobid krater, where Herakles’s excessive force is suggested by the unrealistic multiplication of his abdominal partitions (eight instead of six). The energy and vitality of ponderation as well as the self-control that it implies are thus almost emblematically offered to the gaze of the viewer thanks to the figures’ frontal view. Similarly, the twist that brings the head into full profile, although it is not determined by a sudden movement (the figures are usually in calm situations), suggests, in its thoroughness, vigor and determination: there is no three-quarter “compromise.”

This does not mean that the formula has one invariable and precisely circumscribed semantic charge, a denotative “meaning,” as it were. The role that this version of ponderation plays in each case was co-determined by its

context (nor should we overlook the fact that its pertinent traits may be segmented and perceived differently according to circumstances). For example, on a mirror now in the collection of the Duke of Northampton (Figure 25.4), the same iconographic scheme is used for the softest of heroes, Atunis/Adonis (or possibly Paris, but this would not substantially alter the terms of the issue), who huddles against Turan (Northampton, Castle Ashby, from Bomarzo: *ES* 1.112; van der Meer 1995: 20–22 nos. 12, 26; de Angelis 2002, 53–56; Izzet 2005). The frontal display of Atunis's nudity underscores the beauty of his body. Similarly, the rendering of his head in profile is adapted to the depiction of kissing. In other words, the formula is used here to celebrate the erotic attractiveness of the youthful male body. In this context, ponderation does not underscore the autonomous dynamics of the body but acquires rather languorous connotations. At the same time, it is significant that the engraver did not choose to emphasize Atunis's abandonment beyond a certain point, for example, by imitating postures of fourth-century Greek figures such as Praxiteles's Apollo Sauroktonos or Skopas's Pothos, the inclination of whose bodies requires an external support, and whose poses are often echoed on contemporary Etruscan mirrors. Even though the sinuosity of Atunis's torso is carried further than in any of the examples mentioned above, his body is not off balance. For all its adaptability, the iconographic formula also had a steadiness – a certain resilience, as it were – that allowed artisans to employ it as such and viewers to recognize it. This is all the more plausible in Etruria since the erotic connotations of the ponderated stance were being explored in other contexts as well. This can be seen, for example, by the representation of a beautiful nude young servant in the Tomb of the Orcus in Tarquinia, whose ideal body and elegant stance are, not coincidentally, juxtaposed and contrasted with the plump one of the nearby Silenus-shaped vase stand (Steingraber 1985: fig. 132).



Figure 25.4 Engraved mirror with Atunis and Turan, fourth century BCE. Bronze. From Bomarzo. Northampton, Castle Ashby. Drawing: Gerhard, *ES* 1.112.

The connotations of the formula, therefore, are made especially evident, and in part even generated, by the contexts in which it occurs. In this respect, it is helpful to compare scenes where the formula is used for a particular character and other instances where the same character is represented in a different posture. A good example is provided by a second mirror depicting Heracle holding Epiur in his hand ([Figure 25.5](#)), today in Berlin (Staatliche Museen inv. no. Fr 136: *ES* 2.165; Domenici 2009 (Epiur 2)). In this case the hero presents the child to Menerva instead of Tinia (and the attendant characters are Turan and Munthu instead of Turan and Thalna). For our purposes, the

interesting difference is that Hercle's body is shown in three-quarter view instead of full frontality. Moreover, his thighs appear closer to each other, giving him an air of greater ease. While these distinctions are not exceedingly different from the hero's appearance on the first Epiur mirror, they are useful because they draw attention to the fact that engravers could, and indeed did, choose between alternative options, depending on the circumstances. Indeed, the relevance of these alternatives becomes even more evident when we examine the first Epiur mirror as a whole (see [Figure 25.3](#)). The posture of Hercle in the upper register stands in marked contrast to that of Elchsntre/Paris in the lower one. The latter hero, not by chance a protégé of Turan, is represented in a pose – with one foot placed in front of the other – that became popular in Greek art in the fourth century and is the quintessential embodiment of an unstable, almost dancing, interpretation of ponderation. The virtuosity of this scheme is increased by the view from the back, and is mirrored by Mean, the eroticized personification of success, who crowns him. This suggests that the choice of a particularly “Classical” formula for Hercle on the upper register depends on the desire to differentiate him as much as possible from the figure of Paris, whereas such a need is less present on the second Epiur mirror, where the hero is only surrounded by female figures.



Figure 25.5 Engraved mirror with Hercle presenting Epiur to Menrva in the presence of Turan and Munthu, late fourth century BCE. Bronze. Berlin, Antikenmuseum, Inv. Fr. 136. Drawing: Gerhard, *ES* 2.165.

The situation is even more explicit in the case of Aivas, who displays contrasting body types on the Elinei and the first Epiur mirrors (see [Figures 25.2](#) and [25.3](#)). When he is juxtaposed to the drama of Menle and Elinei on the example in the British Museum, Aivas has a very different body than when represented in the realm of Turan in the lower register of the mirror in the Cabinet des Médailles. There, his twisted posture and gesture of surprise (or dismay?) at the crowning of Elchsntre by Mean has little in common with the dignified tranquility with which the hero observes Menle's aggression or even with the general characterization of the hero in Greek art (for which, see Kahil 1997; Krauskopf 1997). Here, too, contextual elements play a crucial role. In particular, on the mirror showing the aggression toward Elinei,

Aivas's body is part of a broader visual dialogue that includes both male and female interlocutors. On the one hand, the composition of the scene clearly invites the viewer to put the hero's muscular body in relationship with the cuirassed one of Menle. On the other hand, Aivas is also framed by the curvaceous female bodies of Elinei and Phulphsna, both of whom are shown in almost complete nudity. Different degrees of hardness and softness, of activity and passivity, of self-control and loss thereof, are visualized and thematized on this mirror, and exploited according to narrative roles and gender ideals and stereotypes. Distinct formal features are employed for each of them, from the edged and flattish-looking shapes of Menle's cuirass to the rounded and flowing lines of Phulphsna. The situation on the first Epiur mirror is quite the opposite: Aivas's body, which is shown in an almost artificially convoluted pose, has lost its traits of firm masculinity and is assimilated – among other things, through the attribution of a Phrygian cap! – to the figures of the sphere that is presided over by Elinei, who is enthroned in the center and is herself represented in a fashion that rather reminds us of the sorceress Medea in Southern Italian art (Schmidt 1992: 391–392 nos. 29–30, 35–36, 40, 43–45).

6. Conclusions

As heuristically productive as it may be, Hölscher's model cannot be transposed *tout court* to Etruria. If we want to conceive Etruscan art in comparable terms, we cannot discount the degree of historical specificity of its case. Hölscher characterizes Roman art as a semantic *system* – a flexible system, to be sure, but still a consistent one, whose main components have a certain degree of invariance over time and across regions. This character is, in great part, the consequence of the existence of one definite center – Rome – that has a steady artistic output and functions as a reference point for the many other centers in the rest of the Empire. The situation is quite different in Etruria, where the plurality of centers, each of which with its own specific artistic traditions and peculiarities, is not combined with the political and cultural prominence of any one of them over the others. Even though these peculiarities are not incompatible with each other, their diversity is such that one is led to wonder whether we can still speak of a proper “system” in the Etruscan case, or whether we should develop a different model: for example, one consisting of several distinct subsystems or mini-systems (a model, by the way, that could, in turn, also help to integrate better the art of the Roman provinces into Hölscher's model: see also Settis 1989).

More importantly, Rome's relationship to Greek art from the mid-second century BCE on was mainly retrospective: it adopted, revived, and adapted Greek historical styles long after their heyday. Etruscan art, on the contrary,

imported Greek stylistic elements pretty much as they were developing, despite all time lags: its relationship to Greek art was not mediated by historicizing filters. Consequently, the dynamics of innovation and conservatism worked differently in the two cultures (in several respects, the Etruscan case is rather akin to fourth-century eclecticism in Greece, as described by Borbein 1997: 1282–1292). Among other things, the lack of a pronounced erudite dimension has direct bearing on the issue addressed in this chapter. Quite likely, the reception of bodily ideals and postures in Etruria was not systematically conceptualized in terms of specific artistic “styles,” nor were the connotations of such “stylistic” features the object of an intensive discourse that went far beyond the boundaries of the workshop, as it happened in Rome (where, in fact, our evidence of this kind of discourse is provided mainly by rhetorical treatises and other written texts that were not produced by, or meant for, artisans). Instead, the Etruscan relationship with Greek body types must have been much more immediate and sensorial – not naïve or unsophisticated, but certainly less conditioned by comprehensive rationalizing frames with normative ambitions.

In this respect, the tradition of Etruscan studies can suggest the direction to take in order to complement and enhance effectively Hölscher’s interpretive model. One only has to think of Larissa Bonfante’s (1989) groundbreaking article on nudity in ancient art, which provided a new way of understanding this phenomenon by interpreting it as a “costume.” Expanding on these premises, one might consider bodies and body postures themselves as costumes that gods and heroes in Etruria can change as they see fit, i.e., as was required by context or favored by historical developments. This fluidity in the use of stylistic and iconographic formulae in Etruscan art becomes particularly significant in the light of the fact that corporeal costumes are tools that define the persona (*phersu*!) not simply of the represented characters, but also of their makers and viewers, who experience the imagined bodies and relate to them through the medium of their own bodies. Artistic forms – styles, motifs, iconographic schemes – can be connected with bodily and movement ideals in a strong, almost visceral, way. Against this background, the reception of Classical Greek art in Etruria acquires a new dimension, one that, if investigated systematically, is likely to lead us to a more complex and thorough vision of the self-perception (the “identity”) of the Etruscans – as well as to further our understanding of both Greek and Roman art.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

A systematic discussion of physical ideals, notions of the body, as well as postures and gestures (and their representation) in Etruria is still a desideratum. Several important studies exist, however, that focus on specific issues such as nudity (Bonfante 1989) or anatomical votives (Turfa 2004; Recke 2013). Tartarelli 2012 provides a good survey of anthropometric analyses of the Etruscans since the nineteenth century, while Davies 2006 discusses Etruscan "body language." Furthermore, relevant insights on Etruscan attitudes towards the body can be gleaned from research on various topics – ranging from sport and athleticism (Thuillier 1985, 2010; see also Schneider 1995) to women and gender (see Izzet 2012). Future research will benefit from the many investigations and discussions carried out in the Greek and Roman fields (e.g., Stewart 1997; Wyke 1998; Porter 1999; Neri 2004; Cairns 2005; Daehner 2005; Hallett 2005; Hopkins and Wyke 2005; Neri 2005; Bodiou et al. 2006; Prost and Wilgaux 2006; Fabricius 2007; Thommen 2007; Fögen and Lee 2009; Osborne 2011; Squire 2011; Haug 2012). Fehr 1979, Hölscher 2003, and Catoni 2004 are especially important for the perspective advocated in this chapter. On a more general level, anthropologically informed approaches to art provide a stimulating theoretical framework for the study of Etruscan bodies as well: see, for example, Belting 2001 (also Belting et al. 2002) and Bredekamp 2010 (esp. 171–230). For the relevance of Warburg in this context, see Settis 1997a. On empathy, see Curtis and Koch 2009.

CHAPTER 26

Myth in Etruria

Ingrid Krauskopf

1. Introduction¹

“Myth in Etruria” has for a long time been understood as “Greek myth in Etruscan representations.” This is to a great extent accurate – the Etruscans had carried with them an extraordinary interest in Greek myths ever since they had the opportunity to get to know them – but this view in a certain sense is also fraught with optical distortion. Because Etruscan literature is all but lost, except for a few fragments, myth in Etruria is preserved almost exclusively through images. Images of myth taken directly from Greek representations are the most easily recognized and therefore feature most frequently in scholarly discussions; smaller deviations from the presumed “accepted” versions were declared to be Etruscan misunderstandings. Recognition becomes more difficult when studying the second and considerably less extensive group of sources: images inscribed in Etruscan, usually naming the figures depicted. The fact that the image and text do not always correspond with what one would expect, however, cannot be explained merely as misunderstandings; rather these representations demonstrate that, in some cases, the Etruscans “processed” Greek myths and adapted them to their own needs. The third and smallest group of sources points in the same direction: brief references in Greek and Roman literature incorporate Etruscan territory in Greek myth – for example, by naming Greek heroes as the founders of Etruscan cities. Some of these may be very late inventions, while others were apparently already known to the Etruscans themselves. And lastly, especially in Roman literature and name inscriptions, there is evidence for purely Etruscan myths as well. In Etruria, then, images of myths are by no means only more or less well-understood copies of Greek originals. Even when the name inscriptions are missing, they must be analyzed and interpreted very carefully. These and other issues will be addressed chronologically in this chapter.

2. The Villanovan and Orientalizing Periods

During the Villanovan period, figural representations were rare, limited to figures incised in clay or bronze, or rendered as rows of dots: individual human figures, water-birds, game and hunters attacking it. Toward the end of

this period, however, a development began which combined figures conceived three-dimensionally and arranged in increasingly complex scenes. This development culminated in the bronzes from Bisenzio (Pacciarelli 2002: 303–315; Cherici 2005; de Grummond 2006a: 2f., fig. 1.2), in which the scenes selected are probably contemporary yet timeless: activities and rituals which are constantly repeated. Colonna (1979: 304) compares them to the depictions on Achilles' shield, described by Homer. It is in fact possible, although not provable, that the protagonists were thought not to be contemporaries but rather ancestors who, for example, performed rituals for the first time. In the activities shown, there is nothing that can be discerned which extends beyond the normal range of human activities: the bear around which the armed figures dance on the lid of the situla from Bisenzio, for example, may symbolize powers stronger than he himself, but he is nonetheless a bear and not a demon (a plausible interpretation without recourse to the supernatural: Cherici 2005:153f.). Of course, elements that show something supernatural or actions deviating from normal life are not always present even in later illustrations of sagas. But the presence of the supernatural could be recognized only on the basis of such elements, as long as no written tradition (or even name inscriptions) exist. Without such textual aids, we have nothing more than conjecture.

In general, it is unlikely that hunting scenes with numerous figures illustrate myths, even though a centaur appears in one such depiction on a golden pendant now in Munich (Cristofani and Martelli 1983: 279 no. 94, fig. 94; Pacciarelli 2002: 308–309, fig. 3). However, on the basis of a centaur alone, it is impossible to interpret one of the warriors as Herakles, even if this character wields a club (as others also do), because the club was, at that time, not yet the hero's characteristic weapon in Greece (for the weapons and attributes of Herakles in the Geometric and early Archaic periods: *LIMC* 4: 729; *LIMC* 5: 184, 187; d'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999: 151f.; clubs in central Italy: Silvestrini and Sabatini 2008: 78 no. 67). All that the centaur's presence shows is that the Greek repertoire of hybrid mythical beings was beginning to become known in Etruria. In terms of its content, this creature probably represents an extension of the concept of the dangerous wilderness in which the hunters are active.

One would prefer to assign names to both of the combatants on the golden fibula from Vulci, now in Munich (Antikensammlungen inv. no. 2331: Cristofani and Martelli 1983: 281 no. 100, fig. 100; Pacciarelli 2002: 315–322, figs. 5–6), but again, the visual data do not substantiate such a claim. In their display of fighting strength, the men are likened to the lions shown above them. Over them, four birds are flying on the left, but only three on the right, which is probably to be understood as an omen. The warrior on the left will be victorious. This is, however, a pattern that fits many single combats and therefore cannot be associated with a known Greek myth.

Scholars tread on somewhat firmer ground when something quite unusual is depicted. For instance, on a jug now in London (British Museum inv no. 49.518.18: Coldstream 1968; Martelli 1984: 8, fig. 15; Martelli 1987b: 253f. no. 25, fig. 25), which was probably made in Etruria but is Greek Geometric in style, a dance of three men and two women is depicted. The two outer men hold oar-blades (according to the convincing interpretation by Coldstream 1968), and a water-bird, perhaps a crane, appears among the dancers. These motifs, together with the wreath that one of the women has in her hand, suggest that the scene could be a representation of the *geranos*, the crane dance that Theseus performed on Delos with Ariadne and the rescued Athenians after the flight from Crete.² Thus, what at first seems a daring interpretation gains in probability when one considers that Theseus's Cretan adventure left further traces in later Etruscan art.³

During the seventh century (the Orientalizing period), works of Etruscan art more clearly demonstrate a specific connection to a number of Greek myths, especially since they begin to include inscriptions identifying some of the characters that are depicted. Medea, for example, is inscribed in Etruscan as *Metaia* in a scene that appears on a bucchero olpe (Figure 26.1) found in 1988 in Tomb 2 in the Tumulus of San Paolo near Caere/Cerveteri) (Rizzo and Martelli 1983). She stands before a man sitting in a cauldron; this is probably Jason's rejuvenation, even though the male character is not given a name inscription, since there are similar illustrations in contemporary Greek art. The olpe also depicts two boxers, each of whom wears only a single shoe, to the left of this scene, while on the right, a winged figure in a half-kneeling stance (the so-called *Knielaufschema*) is designated as Taitale (i.e., Daidalos). Between Metaia and Taitale, six men walk left toward Metaia, carrying a huge cloth. Here, too, there is another inscription, *kanna*, which is written on the cloth and presumably references it. As a whole, these scenes are unparalleled and have provoked numerous interpretations and reconstructions of their iconographic program.⁴ Suffice to say, the boxing match and the cloth-carriers must be associated with Metaia and can be interpreted as scenes related to the myth of the Argonauts; however, the connection between Metaia and Taitale remains unclear.

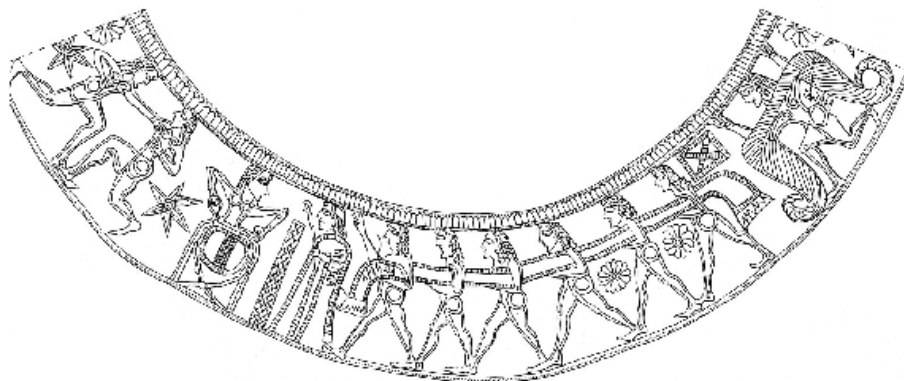


Figure 26.1 Olpe with relief friezes depicting Metaia, a man in a cauldron, youths holding a cloth, boxers, and Taitale, c.630 BCE. Bucchero. From the Tumulus of San Paolo, Tomb 2, Caere. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, inv. no. 2.

Drawing: Rizzo and Martelli 1993: fig. 9. Courtesy of Maria Antonietta Rizzo.

Since one can recognize here, for the first time with certainty, Greek myths on an Etruscan vessel, some basic considerations are in order. In 1999, Bruno d'Agostino and Luca Cerchiali stated that "Etruria is one of the provinces of Greek culture" ("L'Etruria è una delle province della cultura greca") (19). Concerning myth, this implies that the Etruscans never merely copied Greek depictions, gaining often incomplete and sometimes incorrect knowledge of their myths from them. It is also important to remember that these stories, in Etruria as well as in Greece, were not dogmas; rather they could be and, in fact, were, modified in different places and at different times, adapted to the special needs of their patrons.

This view of both the function of myth and its circulation between the Greeks and Etruscans can be qualified still further by another, seemingly contradictory statement: "Etruscans are different from Greeks." The fact that they were "different" was already obvious in antiquity (see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.30.2), and this difference is recognizable to us today in their language and, above all else, in their religion. Essential aspects of the original form of the Etruscan belief system are ascertainable (see further, [Chapters 12](#) and [18](#)), and, as will be demonstrated below, the Etruscans adopted those Greek myths that not only fascinated them but also communicated their own way of thinking. Iconographic programs that were imaginable for contemporary Greek society do not allow themselves to be simply transferred to Etruria. For this reason, unusual versions of sagas found only in Late Antique sources and vague parallels to motifs should only be drawn upon for the interpretation of Etruscan depictions of the seventh century with the utmost caution (this method is found, for example, in the publications of Domenici 2009; Pairault-Massa 1992; Massa-Pairault 1996; for a list of further articles: Domenici 2009: 294f.). Even if we only know very little about the latter, it is important, at the very least attempt, to explain the representations on the basis of their own *Etruscan* environment. On the other hand, independent Etruscan myths should not be immediately postulated for everything that deviates from Greek versions of myths. For every interpretation, therefore, many different considerations have to be weighed against one another; it is understandable that, in doing so, different scholars can arrive at different results. For the seventh century in particular, it is also important to remember that Greek myths first had to become known in Etruria, and that knowledge of them cannot yet be presupposed in the same way as it can in Greece itself.

If we now return to the depiction on the bucchero olpe from San Paolo

discussed above, which no longer belongs to the pictures from the first phase (about half a century long), some deficiencies can be seen. Both of the boxers wear only one shoe each, a motif which recalls Jason's appearance as *monosandalos*; but that narrative has nothing to do with a boxing match. In this case, the picture's designer had clearly imprecisely remembered something that he had probably heard in an oral account. On the other hand, he already knew the Etruscan form of the names of the figures in this Greek myth, suggesting that some of them may therefore already have been formulated in writing. The three inscriptions the artist uses probably designate persons and concepts he wanted to emphasize. Metaia could rejuvenate people through her magic, and – as is shown on a contemporary amphora now in Amsterdam (Allard Pierson Museum, inv. no. 10188; Martelli 1984: 11–13, fig. 37; Martelli 1987b: 265 no. 41, fig. 41; de Grummond 2006a: 3f., fig. 1.5) – could pacify dragons (Marina Martelli has interpreted the image of a (female) snake-charmer on this vase as Medea pacifying the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece). Taitale constructed, among other things, the labyrinth, as well as wings with which he could fly over the sea and the land. The cloth inscribed with the word *kanna*, the exact function of which is unknown to us, is – in its size and its clearly associated magnificence – a wonder of the weaver's art (see also [Chapter 21](#)). In all of these cases, the themes of inventiveness, adroitness, and dexterity play a role, and this associative art of narrativity probably represents the olpe's only "iconographic program." Skillfulness is also displayed by a group of sword dancers on a vessel manufactured probably 30 years before the olpe (Martelli 1987b: 262 no. 38, fig. 38; Simon 1995, 1996: 99–104; Menichetti 1998; de Grummond 2006a: 3 fig. 1.4), who have been interpreted as Argonauts who dance to the music of the just-invented seven-stringed lyre (contra Camporeale 2007). Ariadne's ball of thread and the crown of light are also aids intelligently invented.

These abilities, which can be subsumed under the term $\mu\eta\tilde{\tau}\iota\varsigma$ (*metis*), also characterize Odysseus, whose Polyphemos adventure was first painted around the mid-seventh century by a Greek, Aristonothos, in Caere for an Etruscan buyer (Martelli 1987b: 263. no. 40, fig. 40; *LIMC* 6: s.v. Odysseus/Uthuze no. 56; *LIMC* 8 Suppl.: s.v. Polyphemos no. 16 bis*). Additional vases from the Orientalizing period with other Odysseus-related scenes are known, including his encounters with the Sirens (Martelli 1987a: figs. 17–20; *LIMC* 8 Suppl.: s.v. Polyphemos no. 27; Micozzi 2005) and Scylla (*LIMC* 6: s.v. Odysseus/Uthuze nos. 60–61*; Cristofani 1996; Minetti 1998: 47, n. 85).

On the other side of the krater he signed, Aristonothos painted a battle between a warship and a merchant ship which is manned with soldiers. In this case, one would prefer to think of a contemporary scene rather than of a Greek myth. Correspondingly, on other bucchero *olpai* which are close to the Metaia/Taitale example in both style and findspot, groups of Etruscan dignitaries holding a scepter, *lituus*, and plants in their hands are shown

(Rizzo and Martelli 1988/89: 19–26, figs. 14–27). Because this combination recalls the objects that the personages in the assembly frieze from Poggio Civitate hold in their hands (see further, [Chapter 8](#)), these scenes most likely reflect daily life rather than a myth (but see now note 5).

Thus, during the seventh century, the time period when the Etruscans came into contact with Greek myths, locally produced works of art indicate that they had already developed the ability to translate actions into images. The earliest Greek iconographic types (e.g., centaur) sometimes find their way into these depictions, which are still rooted in traditions inspired by late Villanovan cultural traditions. At the same time, myths must also have been transferred to Etruria through direct contact with Greeks, be it through explanations of the pictures, as summaries of oral presentations, or through recitations of epics. Greek illustrations cannot have been the sole medium of translation because Etruscan representations of Greek myths show, by the Orientalizing period, an astounding independence in pictorial design. In addition, their interest was concentrated on a selection of myths that corresponded only partially to those which were most highly prized in Greece. Odysseus, Medea, and the Argonauts are the most prominent among these, in addition to Theseus's Cretan adventure. In all of these cases, the myths chosen are ones in which a sea voyage plays a decisive role. Ships and dangers on the seas (whether they be enemy ships or giant fish) are also common in pictorial art beyond the mythical cycles named above (Cerchiai 2002; Pizzirani 2005; Krauskopf 2011, 134). As a people who had developed from strongly agricultural origins into a seafaring nation within a short time, the Etruscans' great interest in stories about adventurous voyages and ingenious heroes who prove themselves in the face of many dangers seems self-evident. Military prowess and physical strength – although they may not be lacking – are, in this respect, less important than ingeniousness, trickery, and skillfulness. The first Greek sagas may well have come to Etruria as pictures – in the literal as well as in the figurative sense – for a nation of sailors and merchants who saw their own experiences as seafarers reflected through the mirror of myth.

3. The Archaic Period

As noted above, during the seventh century, pictures of the Etruscan “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) come to assume greater significance, underlying, for example, the representations on the bronzes from Bisenzio and the Caeretan bucchero olpai (with the exception of the Metaia–Taitale vase). A new stage is reached at the end of the century with the *oinochoe* from Tragliatella (Rome, Museo Capitolino inv. no. 358; Martelli 1987b: 271f. no. 49 fig. 49; Small 1986; Martinez-Pinna 1994; *ThesCRA* 1: p. 26 Processions, Etruscan no. 34 = p. 152 Sacrifices, Etruscan no. 124; *ThesCRA* 2: p. 59 Purification,

Etruscan no. 117). Here, scenes from Greek myth have been integrated into an Etruscan narrative context; it is impossible to clarify fully to what extent the mythological model was being recalled or whether an iconographic pattern was simply being translated into a completely different context. The Cretan labyrinth is used for the representation of the Etruscan “Truia” game, and thereby the Truia game is compared to the *geranos*, which imitated the passage through the labyrinth. It is possible that the ship scene in the upper frieze could originally have depicted Theseus and Ariadne. However, the group of three persons – Theseus, Ariadne, and the wet-nurse (as we know them from the François vase: *LIMC* 3 Add.: s.v. Ariadne 48*; *LIMC* 7: s.v. Theseus 264) – turns, with a slight rearrangement, into a family scene of a couple and a daughter. Menichetti’s (1994: 57–65) attempt to interpret all of the scenes on the jug as illustrations of the Theseus legend contradicts the inscriptions, which characterize the three figures of the “family group” unambiguously as Etruscan personages (probably the buyer and/or the person who had been buried in the tomb in which the jug was found). Various possible interpretations result, depending upon whether one assumes that the protagonist is the woman, who is inscribed Thesatheï (Small 1986) or the man, Ammarce or Amnuarce (probably a misspelling for Mamarce: Martinez-Pinna 1994). Since it is scarcely imaginable that the imagery’s original cultural context was unknown, at least in the case of the scene of the labyrinth, it seems probable that the Theseus–Ariadne associations of both of the other scenes were present. This means that Etruscan themes, whether in the context of *Lebenswelt* or as references to the distant past, and Greek myths, were now no longer seen as two separate thematic areas, but rather that they could refer to one another in manifold ways.

In the course of the sixth century, the number of Greek myths that surface in Etruscan depictions increased rapidly. It was during this period that Etruria can be characterized as “una delle province della cultura greca,” but it never lost its own specific cultural character. Together with some of the customs of aristocratic Greek society, corresponding heroic ideals were most likely partially adopted. For the first time, heroes who embody the warrior-ideal in an exemplary manner – above all, Achilles and Herakles – are now popular in Etruscan pictorial art on levels akin to their representations in Greece (for Achilles in Etruria: Hampe and Simon 1964: 45–67; d’Agostino and Cerchiai 1999: 91–128, 134–138; *LIMC* 2009 (G. Camporeale); for Herakles: d’Agostino and Cerchiai 1999: 147–162; *LIMC* 2009 (S. J. Schwarz)).⁵ But Etruscan artists never followed the Greek originals slavishly in either their selection of a myth or in the composition of their scenes. Although these topics cannot be treated exhaustively here, some specific tendencies of the Etruscans’ reception of Greek myths can be pointed out.

Whereas the representations of myths in the seventh century rarely illustrate deities and depict heroes acting independently and without divine assistance,

narratives from the beginning of the sixth century, which rise steadily in number through mid-century, feature gods relatively often. Indeed, if one leaves out the depictions of Dionysos, which were especially popular in Greece, then mythical scenes including gods are probably more common, by proportion, in Etruria. In addition, the Etruscans' conspicuous delay in adopting gods into their depictions can probably be explained as follows: gods, as they are portrayed in the Homeric epics, came down to the earth in human form in order to advise and support their protégés; they also found themselves involved in all-too-human quarrels and love affairs. Depicting gods in this way may, at first, have seemed displeasing to the Etruscans, who imagined their deities instead as abstract powers who manifested themselves through their effects. In the intervening time, the Etruscans became acquainted with various gods from Greek myths, and tried to recognize their own deities in them. They may have found that it was easier in their pleas and prayers to turn to gods with such human-like appearances rather than to "*numina*," which are abstract and difficult to comprehend. The process of the anthropomorphization of the Etruscan pantheon thus began (Maggiani 2004: 188–193) and, to the extent that it progressed, myths about gods became increasingly popular.

In particular, the Etruscans took pleasure in emphasizing the human traits of their deities. This can be seen in two independent depictions of the Judgment of Paris, where Turan (a goddess akin to the Greek Aphrodite) flirtatiously raises the hem of her garment and exposes her calves: the goddess who take pains to please Paris thus use human tricks (*LIMC* 7: s.v. Paridis Iudicium nos. 41–42 with references; *LIMC* 1: s.v. Alexandros 14*; *LIMC* 2: s.v. Aphrodite/Turan no. 13.15*; s.v. Athena/Menerva 241*242). In other cases, however, the gods' own power to avenge heinous deeds and to kill offenders is more clearly emphasized in Etruscan images than in contemporary Greek depictions. For example, on an amphora painted by the Tityos Painter (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale inv. no. 171: Hampe and Simon 1964: 29–34; *LIMC* 2: s.v. Apollon/Aplu no. 3*.7*), Aplu (Apollo) pursues Tityos not on foot, as in Greek pictorial art, but in a two-horse chariot; he is also accompanied by a hybrid being, a griffin. The god's superiority is made apparent just through the space which he and his chariot occupy; at the same time, the speed of his intervention is underlined by the horses' gallop. On the other side of this vase (following Erika Simon's interpretation: Hampe and Simon 1964: 32–34), demons lead Koronis, Apollo's mistress, and her human lover, Ischys, to Apollo and Artemis. This myth could not have been illustrated in this form in Greece, because the helpful demons obviously belong to the realm of death, from which the Greek Apollo – even if he kills – keeps his distance. But for the Etruscans, Aplu had a dark side as an avenging god, perhaps due to his equation with the native god Suri (see *LIMC* 2009 s.v. Apollo/Aplu with references), and artists did not shy away from depicting this aspect of his character.

Due to their religion, which laid great importance on a super-elevated existence in the hereafter and the means by which one could guarantee it, the Etruscans were very interested in the corresponding episodes in Greek myths. On the chariot from Monteleone (Hampe and Simon 1964: 53–67; Menichetti 1994: 121f.; Emiliozzi 2011: 41–49), for example, Achilles is shown on a side panel above the dying Polyxena, flying in a chariot drawn by winged horses into the Beyond, to the island of Leuke. In the main picture (the front panel), he receives the weapons made by Hephaistos from his divine mother; and on the other side panel, he fights against Memnon, also the son of a goddess. After his defeat and death, Memnon is carried away by his mother, Eos, into an eternal life (*LIMC* 3: s.v. Eos, pp. 783–87 (C. Weiß); s.v. Eos/Thesan: pp. 795–796 (R. Bloch and N. Minot)). The Greek black-figure painter of the so-called “Ricci” hydria now in the Villa Giulia Museum probably worked in Etruria (the vase was found in Caere), and therefore took this interest in Achilles and Memnon into account when he represented the intercession of both of the divine mothers for their sons in a dramatic composition.⁶ He depicted Achilles and Memnon fighting on the right, while on the left, the mothers beseech Zeus, who holds a pair of scales. That this theme was not only of interest to the Etruscans but also one that they adapted to their own way of thinking can be seen on an engraved mirror from the later fifth century now in the Vatican (Museo Gregoriano Etrusco inv. no. 12257: *LIMC* 3: 795 s.v. Eos/Thesan no. 33; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Zeus/Tinia no. 65*; de Grummond 2006a: 53f., fig. 4.1). It depicts Tinia (Zeus) holding two types of his lightning bolts instead of the Greek scales. As is well-known, he had three of them, each with increasingly power: from the first (warning) to the third (devastation). On the mirror, he holds his most powerful lightning bolt, the one with which he is usually depicted, on the side of Thesan (Eos), thus signifying Memnon’s future demise at the hands of the Greek hero.

On the other side of the “Ricci” hydria, the vase-painter, who was obviously well aware of his clients’ interests, depicted another god’s son, Herakles, the most popular of all in Etruria, on his way to Olympus. In contrast to other heroes who had attained immortality, Herakles is taken up to Olympus, where he becomes a god. The Etruscans appear to have prized this special status much more highly than the Greeks: they considered their Hercle to be a god of equal right amongst the other deities, even though he had once been a human being. While the Greek painter of the “Ricci” hydria lets him follow the procession leading him to Olympus somewhat reticently as the last person (as was customary in Greece), most Etruscan representations change this convention so that he approaches his father Tinia, who greets him with a handshake, self-consciously (*LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle no. 393*; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Zeus/Tinia no. 73). Later, in the fourth century, Hercle’s reception among the gods appears as an adoption rite and thus as legally correct. On a number of engraved mirrors, Uni suckles the adult Hercle, who – as the inscription assures us – becomes her son through this act (*LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle

nos. 400–404*; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Uni nos. 86*–90; de Grummond 2006a: 83f., figs. 5.14–17). In his ambivalent relationship to Uni, Herakles’s changed position in comparison with Hercle shows itself most clearly. The enmity between Hera and Herakles, one of the leitmotifs of the Herakles legends, is, in fact, somewhat mitigated in the Euboean/West Greek variant of the saga: Herakles defends Hera against an attack by satyrs and founds the Hera sanctuary in Croton (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.51.3), but the struggle between Hera and Herakles over one of her sanctuaries is not made known. This fight, however, is exactly what appears on a “Pontic” amphora (London, British Museum inv. no. B 57; Hampe and Simon 1964: pl. 6.1; *LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle no. 362*; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Uni no. 67; de Grummond 2006a: 81f., fig. 5.11). Perhaps they are quarreling over the possession of the cauldrons depicted between them, but the reasons for their duel are unknown in Greek literature. This vase suggests that a new variant of the saga was created in Etruria, one which could hardly be imagined in Greece. The same conflict is shown again on an Etruscan amphora, which is related to the atelier of the Caeretan hydriai (Rome, Villa Giulia, from Cerveteri, Banditaccia necropolis, grave 86: Hemelrijk 1984: 191, pl. 149b-c; *LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle no. 363; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Uni no. 68*). In this scene, the presumed mediators, Tinia/Zeus and Menerva/Athena, are not yet present (they both appear on the Pontic vase mentioned above), but instead the painter depicts three women who act in an animated fashion who may reference an earlier phase of the quarrel. At the same time, the defense of Uni against the assaulting satyrs is also often depicted in Etruscan art (Simon 1992; *LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle nos. 366*–367*; *LIMC* 8: s.v. Uni nos. 78–80). And, on the middle acroterion of Temple B at Pyrgi, Hercle stands probably as a *paredros* beside Uni (Colonna 2000a: 289–292, figs. 27–28; *LIMC* 2009: s.v. Herakles/Hercle add. 48), paralleling what is seen in the Portonaccio sanctuary in Veii when he appears next to Menerva (*LIMC* 2009: s.v. Herakles/Hercle add. 47). Votive inscriptions testify to a cult of the god Hercle from the fifth century on (Maras 2009: 503 s.v. Hercle) and the center of the cult was apparently Caere. As the only divinity with a name derived from the Greek, Hercle has a field on the liver from Piacenza (van der Meer 1987: 122–124). Thus, the history of this Etruscan god can be apprehended for the first time in the representations of the conflict with Uni, which is also, at present, the first definitive modification of a Greek myth by the Etruscans. Later, more specifically Etruscan variants of the Hercle/Herakles myth followed: he wrestles with Mlacuch like Peleus with Thetis on a relief mirror now in London (Swaddling 2001: no. 20; Carpino 2003: 9–16 pls. 1–3; de Grummond 2006a: 187s. fig. 8.16), and is adopted by Uni through a ritual nursing. The scenes showing his voyage on an amphora raft probably also belong in this eschatological context (*LIMC* 5: s.v. Herakles/Hercle nos. 337–41, p. 252; Torelli 2002: 127). Finally, Hercle’s many labors during his human existence are also frequently depicted (*LIMC* 5 and *LIMC* 2009 s.v.

Hercle).

The Greek myth of Herakles had, therefore, already in the sixth century been so well-naturalized in Etruria that it could be modified and then transformed into a Graeco-Etruscan myth. Besides these examples, one also finds illustrations that do not alter the myth but rather depict it in a form in which it was not shown in Greece.⁷ The latter case not only suggests that the Greek sagas were available in Etruria in a written Greek or Etruscan form, but also that these texts were probably the most important source of this material for the Etruscans. Speaking in favor of this view are the many themes that the painters in the Caeretan hydriai workshop offered to their customers. Although their vases were well-regarded and popular, their narrative did not have a lasting influence on the Etruscan repertoire of Greek mythological scenes during the Archaic period (for the choice of themes: Hemelrijk 1984: 117–121; Hemelrik 2009: 70–72; Bonaudo 2004).

Thus, during the sixth century, the choice of Greek mythological scenes no longer followed the supply of depictions (if this had ever been the case at all) coming in from abroad, but instead was driven by whatever purely Etruscan interests and needs arose – above all, wherever the myths were to be displayed publicly. On early architectural terracottas, mythological scenes are rarely found. Two scenes from the Hercle saga (his fights with the Nemean lion and the bull) are exceptions, as these were intermingled with warrior processions in friezes that enhanced domestic structures in Acquarossa; given their context, Hercle functions, in a certain sense, as a model and standard of comparison for the warriors (Torelli 1997: 96–97, figs. 70–71; 87–121 on the Archaic terracotta friezes in Latium and Etruria; *ThesCRA* 1.1: p. 27 Processions, Etruscan no. 48c. 49). In the last third of the sixth century, more representations of Etruscan deities appear (e.g., the statue group of Hercle and Menerva already mentioned), sometimes in complex scenes, such as the conflict between Hercle and Aplu and the killing of the dragon Python in the Portonaccio sanctuary in Veii (*LIMC* 2: s.v. Apollon/Aplu nos. 10*, 12*; see also nos. 11, 13*), and Thesan abducting a young lover on an acroterion from Caere now in Berlin (*LIMC* 3: s.v. Eos/Thesan nos. 20, 29). That such stories about gods are also now employed in Etruscan cult buildings shows that Greek myth was not only found to be of interest as a literary phenomenon, but also that it had gained entry into Etruscan religion.

4. The Classical Period

In the first decades of the fifth century, a change takes place in Caere that can be traced in the architecture of the sanctuary at Pyrgi, their harbor emporium. The cause was possibly the fall of Thefarie Velianas, who was most likely responsible for building Temple B, a Greek-style peripteral structure

enhanced with reliefs depicting scenes from the labors of Heracles (Colonna 2000a: 283–294). While an Etruscan building type (see further, [Chapter 12](#)) was chosen for the new temple, now known as Temple A, a Greek myth was the subject of the pedimental reliefs on the side facing the city. Instead of the legend of Heracles, the temple's patrons selected stories related to the siege of the Seven against Thebes, which was caused by the conflict of Oedipus's sons for the rule of Thebes (Colonna 2000a: 309–325). Illustrating the terrible consequences of internal strife, it may have served as a warning against political conflicts in Caere itself. But if this had been the only motive for the choice of the theme, one would expect to see Eteokles and Polyneikes on the central *antepagmentum* ([Figure 26.2](#); the terracotta slab used to conceal the ends of the beams in an open wooden pediment). But these characters were probably shown on one of the side *antepagmenta*; the center, instead, is reserved for Tydeus and Kapaneus, who had wanted to determine their fates without the help of – or even against the will of – the gods. Kapaneus wanted to storm Thebes's walls against Zeus's will; Tydeus wanted to appropriate new vitality by devouring the brain of his opponent, Melanippos. The sculptor depicts Athena/Menerva, who had wanted to bring Tydeus the elixir of immortality, turning away in disgust at his barbaric behavior, while Zeus/Tinia confronts Kapaneus and hurls his deadly lightning bolt at close quarters. The admonition against the hubris of acting against the will of the gods thus eclipsed the warning against internal conflict; both, however, were addressed to the citizens of Caere. It is true that we have little knowledge of the political situation in Caere in the first half of the fifth century, but the assumption that the myths had been employed here in a manner similar to that in Greece suggests itself: the relief images demonstrate piety and are, at the same time, the instrument of a resolute propaganda against an adversary, internal or external.



Figure 26.2 *Antepagmentum* (relief panel) depicting a scene from the Seven Against Thebes, 470–460 BCE. Painted terracotta. From the rear pediment of Temple A, Pyrgi. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia.

Photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: fig. 179).

Greek myths were adopted in other contexts as well: contemporary with the pediment of Temple A, for example, started and may have spread the custom of engraving figures in pictures on the underside of scarabs with name inscriptions (Krauskopf 1995, 1999; Torelli 2002; Ambrosini 2011). In this way, stock figures – athletes; warriors arming themselves, fighting, or collapsing; seated individuals sunk in contemplation – were transformed into Greek heroes. For the most part, the chosen motifs lend themselves to and can be reconciled with a certain situation in the respective hero's life – they are, therefore, not without any meaning, but they are also not specifically tailored to the respective hero. It is perfectly understandable that an Etruscan man would choose depictions of Herakles, Achilles, and Theseus as ideals of heroic virtues for the ring that he would use to seal documents. The popularity of Tydeus and Kapaneus, however, is less easily understood, for who would have wanted to identify himself (presumably) with these examples of utmost hubris?

Mario Torelli (2002) attempted to interpret the pictures on scarabs by categorizing the roles that their owners might have attributed themselves: e.g., warriors, athletes, youths at the transition to adulthood (initiation), priests, etc. However, even Torelli fails to find an explanation for why Kapaneus, who

should be used as amulet against lightning, can be represented not only as lightning-struck but also as a warrior arming himself. The same stock motif is used for his son Sthenelos, who is characterized by Torelli as Diomedes's charioteer, however, and therefore eligible for persons engaged in chariot races.⁸ But why is he represented as a hoplite, then? Therefore Torelli is forced to concede that "the well-known popularity of the Theban legend in Etruria was evidently the product of a vast local diffusion of literary traditions" ("la ben nota popolarità della legenda tebana in Etruria, evidente prodotto di una vasta diffusione locale di tradizioni letterarie" (2002: 133)).

But an alternative explanation may be proposed, one that is supported by several passages in Classical literature. During the late second–early third centuries CE, Athenaeus (6 p. 251 d), writes about a certain Kallikrates, who not only used a seal with a depiction of Odysseus, but also gave his children the same names as those close to Odysseus (e.g., Telegonos and Antikleia) so as to suggest the alleged descent of his family from this hero. Foundation legends of western Greek and Italic cities, in which the sons of famous Greek heroes act as founders, are also numerous in Greek and Roman literature. Individual clans traced their lineage back to famous heroes: the best-known example is the Roman *gens* Julia, which derived its descent through Iulus-Ascanius from Aeneas.⁹ There are some good arguments to support the assumption that such legends did not first arise in the Late Republican period, but that they had a much longer ancestry. In fact, the scarabs discussed above suggest that the Etruscans had already, in the fifth century, begun doing what the western Greek cities had practiced even earlier: they associated their own history with the Greek heroic past through new versions of myths, which did not even necessarily concern Greek heroes. The example of Aeneas and Rome shows that it was not even necessary to relinquish one's own identity.

If one accepts these considerations, it becomes clear that Greek myths were – from the fifth century at the latest – no longer felt to be something foreign in Etruria. Rather, by integrating them into their own "cultural memory," the Etruscans had – in a certain sense – developed them further in order to associate their own history with a mythical, early Greek one.

So, as far as myths are concerned, Etruria was now "una delle province della cultura greca." But with regard to their religion in the broadest sense, from their conceptions of the Afterworld to their views about divinities, this statement does not hold true. For in this respect, the Etruscans were still very different from the Greeks, even if Greek philosophers doubtlessly found interested listeners and adherents in Etruria (without Etruscan texts, the latter can be grasped only in the evidence of the Dionysian–Orphic cult, which has left noticeable traces in the arts and crafts as well). Etruria, therefore, remained a very special province of Greek culture.

5. The Late Fourth Century and the Hellenistic Period

Even in the last centuries of its culture, during which the ruling class gradually integrated itself into a Graeco-Roman *koine*, it is not possible to explain Etruscan depictions by imposing iconological models of a Greek “mainstream” reception and interpretation of myth.

This becomes especially apparent when name inscriptions are preserved on representations which – even though they cannot replace the lost texts – at least point scholars in a direction to understand them. In this regard, the illustrations on the backs of bronze mirrors are especially helpful (see further, van der Meer 1995; de Angelis 2002; de Grummond 2006a, b). At the same time, they open a new pictorial repertoire, which takes the interests of Etruscan women into account. It is self-evident that Turan (and everything that she is associated with) occupies a central place in these depictions, but there are other themes as well. Turan seldom appears alone or only accompanied by Eros; rather, she is most often part of an entourage of allegorical figures or “demons” identified by name. This has antecedents on the Attic vases of the “Rich Style,” to which Mauro Cristofani (1985) has alluded, and some of the Etruscan figures might, in fact, correspond to the personifications pictured on this Greek pottery.

Other members of Turan’s entourage must have functioned as more than mere personifications that were intended to make her realm concrete. This view applies, above all, to Thalna and Thanr, who often appear together, not only in Turan’s circle, but, also at the birth of Menerva.¹⁰ There, they take the place which the Eileithyiai have in the Greek originals, which has led to the interpretation of Thanr as a goddess of birth (*LIMC* 7: 908 (C. Weber-Lehmann)). But Thanr is an important goddess, who appears together with Aplu on a mirror from Viterbo (*LIMC* 2009: 80, 82 s.v. Aplu no. add. 3). Inscriptions, moreover, associate her with the Underworld, and she is even the eponymous center of a circle of divinities that included Turan (Maras 1998). If one wanted to characterize Thanr, she would be designated best as a goddess of fate, thus making her an appropriate deity to witness a birth. As was seen above on the Vatican mirror that depicted Tinia with two different lightning bolts, the Etruscans continually adapted the gods acting in Greek mythological depictions, or they replaced them with their own gods.

The Etruscan mirrors with scenes of the birth of Athena correspond, in their composition, to depictions from the Greek Archaic period: Athena jumps, as small as a doll, out of her father’s head. Once the East pediment of the Parthenon was on view (before the end of the third quarter of the fifth century), Greek artists abandoned this formula. In Etruria, however, the iconographic type adopted in the sixth century was handed down and used up until the third century.¹¹ We do not know in what manner this

happened; but we can gather from it how little we know not only about the literature of the Etruscans but also about their image-world in spite of the many representations that have been preserved. Motifs had obviously been taken over, not only from Archaic, but also from Classical Greek art, which the Etruscans appreciated, even if they could not follow them stylistically (compare the discussion in [Chapter 24](#)). The group of Niobe holding one of her dying sons in her arms from the throne of Zeus in Olympia (*LIMC* 6: s.v. Niobidai no. 15), for example, was reinterpreted on mirrors, transformed either into Semele with her son Fufluns (Dionysos) or Turan with her boyish lover, Atunis.¹² In both depictions, Aplu stands nearby, with either a flute-playing satyr or an Eros with an *inx* (a love-toy with a wheel and a string that can twist and cast a spell) sitting at his feet. In an analysis of the Semele mirrors, Erika Simon (1996: 65 n. 40) found it possible that, by this adoption of the motif, Phidias' original was intentionally "quoted": Niobe loses her son to death while Semele overcomes death through her son. After the find of the Turan–Atunis mirror from Castel Viscardo, we can add to this reading: the goddess can snatch her beloved away from the Underworld at least for a part of the year. In both cases, Aplu is present as a god of fate; he stands, in a certain sense, for death, even though he does not cause it directly as in the Greek Niobe group.

The mirrors discussed above belong to a group of illustrations which have been designed according to a new, extraordinarily successful composition in Etruria: mythological figures are set next to one another, either completely inactive or with a very sparing but significant indication of action. The range of variation, moreover, extends from an intelligently well-planned composition (seen especially in the details) to a simple lining-up of figures, such as from the Trojan Cycle (on this group: Giuliani 1986: 51; Krauskopf 1993; de Angelis 2002; on the origin of the concept: van der Meer 1985: 82). This type of composition reaches its zenith in a mirror now in Berlin ([Figure 26.3](#)) that depicts Athrpa (Atropos) and two pairs of lovers, Turan with Atunis and Atlenta (Atalante) with Meliacr (Meleagros) (*LIMC* 2: p. 1–2 s.v. Athrpa (E. Simon); *LIMC* 6: s.v. Meleagros no. 65 p. 433 (I. Krauskopf); van der Meer 1985: 77f; Giuliani 1986). Athrpa, who hammers a nail into the right rim of the medallion, is the focus of the composition. On the left sits Atunis; Turan, standing behind him, lays her arm around his shoulder. On the right, Atlenta and Meliacr echo their poses. The formal model for Athrpa was a Nike setting up a tropaion on Syracusan coins. From it, it had been concluded that Athrpa, too, wanted to set up a victory memorial, in that she fastened a boar's head on a pole or a tree-trunk (Giuliani 1986), but the boar's head appears *behind* the hand holding the nail, without a direct connection to it. It was supposed to be a victory trophy for both of the couples, but instead, both male lovers are killed by a boar, either directly (Atunis) or indirectly (Meliacr in the conflict over the trophy). Athrpa thus hammers in the nail that represents the end of a period – in this case, both Atunis's and Meliacr's lives.

Her wings are spread out behind both of the “death candidates,” like those of the death demon Vanth who appears behind Achilles and Patroklos paintings in the François Tomb at Vulci (see further, below). She restrains the goddess of love, who has laid her left hand on Athrpa’s shoulder, but cannot stop the arm raised to strike with the hammer. In view of the literate combination of motifs, it is quite probable that the artist also incorporated the associations of the motif’s original meaning: the boar hunt was supposed to end in victory and triumph, but instead of Nike, Athrpa appears, with the death demon’s hammer.



Figure 26.3 Engraved mirror with Athrpa, Turan, Atunis, Meliacr and Atlenta, late fourth century BCE. Bronze. From Perugia. Berlin, Antikenmuseum, Inv. Fr. 146.

Drawing: Zimmer 1987: fig. 19. © bpk, Berlin/Antikensammlung, SMB.

The theme on the Athrpa mirror, therefore, is not the portrayal of a mythical

scene, but it represents a confrontation of or a reflection on myths, which presupposes a very erudite public. There is no reason to assume that such public did not exist in Etruria. Of course, not all of the Etruscan women who used these mirrors would have been able to understand the ingenious reinterpretations of motifs and all of the composition's subtleties. But what is surprising is the significant number of name inscriptions, which – for us – cannot be sensibly related to one another on mirrors that use the composition mentioned in a simplified form. In other words, they merely set figures next to one another in a sort of *sacra conversazione* (see further, Bonfante 1980). On one mirror, for example the couples Helen (Elinei) and Paris (Elchsntre), as well as Chryseis (Crisitha) and Achilles (Achle) appear together, and in this case, it is possible that the engraver confused Chryseis with Briseis (*LIMC* 3: s.v. Chryseis 1 n. 4*). But what Kapaneus (Capne), Kassandra (Castra), Aias (Evas), and Kastor (Castur) could have to do with one another on another example is scarcely comprehensible (*LIMC* 1: s.v. Aias 2 no. 116; *LIMC* 3: s.v. Dioskouroi Tinias Cliniar no. 90; *LIMC* 5: s.v. Kapaneus no. 5). We find similar representations on Praenestine mirrors and *cistae*; there, for instance, the figures of Bellerophon (Melerpanta), Oinomaos (Oinomavos), and the winged horse Areion (Ario) – three myths in which immortal horses play a role – are combined with one another (London, British Museum, inv. no. 695; *LIMC* 2: s.v. Areion no. 5*; *LIMC* 7: s.v. Oinomaos no. 24; de Angelis 2002: 45–48). The simplest explanation would be that the engraver was not well-acquainted with the myths and confused some of the elements, but nonetheless wanted to profit from the clearly great demand for mirrors with name inscriptions. This suggests that perhaps neither the engraver nor the purchaser(s) were interested in whether everything depicted was entirely consistent. By using such mirrors, the buyers would have wanted to demonstrate their interest in myths and, with it, their erudition (Krauskopf 1993).

In an important study on the mirrors and *cistae* with “false” name inscriptions, Francesco de Angelis (2002) demonstrated how such “misunderstandings” could have occurred, and that the view expressed above probably simplifies the situation too much. De Angelis argued that the interest of the purchasers was directed less at the correct reproduction of a myth than at the depictions as such – for example, images which show the tender affection of a mature woman for a youth, or the departure of a young man with a particular mission, or simply people of various ages. That is certainly correct, because the majority of the mirrors have neither name inscriptions nor a characteristic action that would make it possible to identify the persons depicted with certainty. One would then have to ask oneself, however, why name inscriptions were engraved on the mirrors at all. There was obviously widespread interest in myths, already in the fourth and third centuries, not only among a small, well-educated class. The inscriptions provided individual Etruscans with the opportunity to explain what she or he knew about the

heroes shown, how the figures were to be related to one another, or just simply to demonstrate an interest in myths. Plutarch (*Life of Marcellus* 21) relates that the works of art brought to Rome after the capture of Syracuse had brought “glib talk about art and artists” into fashion there, and that the Romans “spent a great part of the day in such clever disputation.” One could imagine Etruscan ladies having similar disputations about myths.

During the Hellenistic period, illustrations of myths entered a context where they had been almost completely absent: funerary art. The frescoes in the Tomb of the Bulls (*LIMC* 1: s.v. Achilleus/Achle no. 14; Simon 1996: 55–70; d’Agostino and Cerchiai 1999: 91–106) and the François tomb remain exceptions in the context of the funerary environment, but their portable furnishings – sarcophagi and ash urns – had, since the late fourth century, been increasingly decorated with mythological scenes. These showed a certain penchant for depictions of assault, combat, and murder. Indeed, these are the scenes which brought the Etruscans the accusation of having a peculiar predilection for cruelty, or, at least, for depictions of cruelty – particularly because Greek mythological scenes were often not reproduced “correctly,” so that the interest seemed to apply less to the myth than to their atrocious nature (Steuernagel 1998: 16). Dirk Steuernagel (1998) has investigated in detail how the deviations from the correct mythological illustrations came about; in fact, pictorial motifs such as “the hero at the altar” seem to be more decisive than individual myths.

This, however, does not explain the choice of the myths. Part of the explanation could be offered by the anthropological hypothesis that the deceased, enraged over his or her mortal fate, had to be appeased with blood. Additionally, there is the tradition – in a certain sense, a ritual expression of this idea – of the sacrifices through which the dead could become *dii animales* (Steuernagel 1998: 144–165; Camporeale 2009; and also [Chapter 11](#)). Steuernagel adds that the Etruscan upper class must have felt itself being increasingly endangered during the Hellenistic period and, for that reason, reacted increasingly with emphasis on the traditional religion. Offenses against this aristocratic religion and its adherents were to be denounced as a sacrilege similar to that of the violence in sanctuaries shown in the depictions. On the other hand, the importance of the aristocratic *gentes* was set against the threat of new classes, which implied a costly cult of the dead, with bloody sacrifices and dangerous funeral games, which alluded to human sacrifice in a heroic early age.

De Angelis’s explanation echoes that of Steuernagel’s: “The dramatic dissolution of familial bonds” [as it may be observed in the myths illustrated] “served as a negative paradigm, and expressed the danger of a collapse which was perceived by the group to which the deceased had belonged” (translated from de Angelis 1999: 66). Both of these hypotheses may, in fact, explain a preference for certain depictions, such as the continuing interest in the history

of Oedipus' family and of the Atridae, as well as crimes against the gods and "murder at the altar." The question is, however, whether warnings against internal discord and sacrileges were sensibly placed in the tomb. The middle and lower classes, which were pressing for power, probably had little access to the burial rituals and to the tombs of the aristocrats, and the deceased's family was more in need of consolation than of warnings. If one examines the entire iconographic programs of the Hellenistic period tombs, the walls – inasmuch as they are decorated with frescoes – show the journey into the Afterworld, and – in the figures reclining at the banquet on the lids of sarcophagi and urns – life in the Afterworld. These sarcophagi and urn reliefs should, therefore, be associated with these subjects rather than with political statements without any direct relationship to the family.

As is well known, similarly dreadful mythological scenes can be found on Roman sarcophagi, along with themes that have more positive connotations. Paul Zanker, who has dealt with this subject most recently, quotes Classical authors who find comfort in such scenes through the knowledge that others were much worse off than the present mourners (Zanker and Ewald 2004: 41f., 110). Even if there is an element of caricature to be found in this sentiment, no better explanation has, as yet, been found. In Etruria, one must probably also take into account that the enraged, "bloodthirsty" deceased could be satisfied through this surrogate method since the idea of a burial sacrifice is, in this manner, at least touched upon in the scenes. Of course, it is also possible that strife within some families and/or sacrilege may have played a role in the choice of a particular narrative from the overabundant repertoire of appropriate scenes, as Steuernagel and de Angelis have pointed out.

On the Hellenistic urns, depictions that do not belong either to one of the known Greek myths or to one of the cycles which revolve around the deceased and the afterlife are rarely found. Since scholars began studying the urns' imagery, they viewed them as Etruscan myths and, when possible, connected them with the few that are preserved in Latin literature. For instance, the scene in which a shackled monster (half-wolf, half-human) rises out of a puteal has been associated with the *vetus fama Etruriae* (Pliny *Natural History* 2.140), according to which King Porsenna had directed a lightning bolt against a monster called Olta, which was devastating the fields of Volsinii (Orvieto) (Cherici 1994; *LIMC* 7: 35–7 Olta (J. G. Szilagy); Colonna 2000b: 283f.; Domenici 2009: 175–196; but see note 13 below). In defense of this interpretation, which has been widely rejected, Giovanni Colonna recently put forward the argument that perhaps it is not the lightning-strike itself that is shown, but rather the evocation of it, done by means of a libation. Now, Olta is back in the discussion, but in the context of the one of the previously presented interpretations which takes three essential pictorial elements into consideration: a *mundus*, which opens onto the Afterworld; a

being, the appearance of which fluctuates between wolf and human; and a libation, which initiates a ritual act. None of these elements has been borrowed from Greek models. This complete independence from Greek antecedents is characteristic for those Etruscan myths that have their roots in local religious concepts and rites. To these we can add, for instance, the myth of Tages, the *puer senex*. According to literary sources, Tages appeared out of the earth by plowing, and dictated the *disciplina etrusca* either to Tarchon or to the rulers of all Etruria. A late-fourth-century mirror from Tuscania, now in Florence, may depict a following act, the first divination by the inspection of a liver (haruspication) which is shown as taking place in the sanctuary of Rath and must have had a special importance for the leaders of Tarquinia (*LIMC* 8: 281f. s.v. Voltumna with references (M. Harari); de Grummond 2006a: 25–27, fig. 2.2). There are also depictions of ritual acts, in which Greek and Etruscan elements intermingle: e.g., the saga of the prophesying head of Orpheus had probably been adapted in Etruria in a similar fashion as the myths of the Greek gods and heroes mentioned above (*LIMC* 8: 158f. s.v. Umaele, Umaile (G. Camporeale); *LIMC* 2009: 405–407 s.v. Orpheus/Urphe (G. Bagnasco Gianni); de Grummond 2006a: 32–40). Later, narratives about Etruscan gods or demons, who could not be equated with Greek gods, were added to the Graeco-Etruscan myths: e.g., Epiur (*LIMC* 3: 810–12 (E. Mavleev)) and Maris (*LIMC* 6: 358–360 (M. Cristofani); de Grummond 2006b).

In some cases, Greek pictorial motifs as well as mythological patterns were probably used for Etruscan mythological figures. The attack on the seer Cacū (*LIMC* 3: 175f. (E. Mavleev)); de Grummond 2006a: 27f., fig. 2.5; 174–180), for example, recalls the joint action of Odysseus and Diomedes in capturing Dolon (*LIMC* 2: 660–664 (D. Williams)), as well as the motif that seers have to be compelled to speak. However, no complete Etruscan saga can be reconstructed on this basis.¹³

In rare cases, there are scenes on Hellenistic urns which have parallels in Roman representations – as, for example, a figure fallen on its knees at which defensive weapons such as armor, helmets, and shields are thrown from both sides (Volterra, Museo Guarnacci inv. nos. 204, 205: Maggiani 1992: 5–12, figs. 7–18). This recalls Tarpeia's punishment, even though the figure on the urns is, in all probability, male. Perhaps traitors were also killed in this way in Etruria, or were there parallel narratives? In a different manner, Jocelyn P. Small has, in various articles (1981, 1982), attempted to recognize Roman sagas documented in Latin literary sources in scenes on Etruscan urns that deviate from known scenes, or which cannot be interpreted at all. But none of these supposed Roman scenes are represented in Roman art and none of the popular Roman stories (the *Lupa romana*, etc.) is represented on Etruscan urns.

The protagonists of the assault on the seer Cacū (see above), the brothers

Caile and Avle Vipinas, are also portrayed in the François Tomb (Buranelli 1987; Harari 2007; Lowenstam 2008: 158–164; Laurendi 2010, with further literature). In the painting, the artist focuses on the attack by Avle Vipinas and his companions on a group of Etruscans from various cities in order to free the prisoner Caile Vipinas; Macstrna is shown cutting Caile's bonds with his sword. The brothers are mentioned in Roman historiography as Caelius and Aulus Vibenna, together with Mastarna, the later Roman king Servius Tullius, in a different context. In Roman sources, a Cacus actually occurs, and there is possibly also a partial confusion of Cacus and Cacū, but in the representation of the Apollonian seer Cacū, the mythical elements predominate.¹⁴ The Vipinas brothers, on the other hand, are at least partially historical figures. An Avle Vipiennas dedicated a bucchero vessel in the mid-sixth century in the Portonaccio sanctuary in Veii (*ET* Ve.3.11; Boitani in Buranelli 1987: 234). It is therefore probable that the names of their companions and their Etruscan opponents were not completely fictitious, but were based on tradition, which could certainly already have existed in written form (for traces of Etruscan historiography see Sordi 1995: 40ff., 91f.). As a counterpart, the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners by Achilles at the funeral pyre for Patroklos is depicted on the opposite wall. This was a well-considered iconographic program which, in the end, functioned to promote the fame of the tomb owner, Vel Saties, who had himself and his family painted opposite a selection of Greek heroes on the other walls (see further, [Chapter 27](#)). It would be false to claim that Greek myth and Etruscan history confronted one another here – as is well-known, there is no fundamental difference between myth and history in antiquity, only gradations. Some of the Greek heroes may have been seen as fathers to the founders of Etruscan cities, or as ancestors of Etruscan *gentes*. The story of the brothers Vipinas was, at the time of the decoration of the François Tomb – through the incorporation of mythical elements, such as the attack on the seer Cacū – just beginning to mutate into a myth in the modern sense. Other parts of their story were, at an unknown but probably not much later time, taken up in the tradition of early Roman history. Thus, both the borderlines between myth and history and those between Greek, Etruscan, and Roman “mythical” early history began to vanish, as the latter begins to appear as facets of a single history, which can be seen from different viewpoints and put to work for various interests. A specifically Etruscan way of treating myths, one which is clearly different from that in Rome, may have been preserved longest in the private sphere: in funerary art through the reliefs on the Hellenistic period sarcophagi and urns.

6. Conclusion

Original Etruscan myths are only securely detectable starting in the fourth century BCE. With a high degree of probability, the Etruscans in their early days had no narratives that were even remotely comparable to Greek myths and they were thus clearly fascinated by them as soon as they got to know them – at the turn of the seventh century at the latest. However, rather than simply receiving them passively, the Etruscans in fact incorporated these stories into their own cultural practices: they selected narratives which told of adventurous sea voyages that could be endured not only by bravery in battle but also required ingenuity and cunning, as well as other stories that focused on inventive talent and artistry. They adopted Greek images from sagas as templates for their histories (as seen on the jug from Tragliatella) and interested themselves, during the Archaic period, not only with myths, which transported the ideals of Greek elite society (Achilles), but also with stories about the gods which gave a more human form to their own abstract deities; myths from the latter group were further developed in Etruria and thus better adapted to Etruscan concepts of divinity. From approximately the fifth century onward, the Etruscans devised sagas in which heroes migrated into Etruria and founded cities there, parallel to their development in Magna Graecia. Greek myth inserted itself into all sectors of Etruscan life, including the female sphere (as seen on engraved mirrors) and, from the fourth century onward, increasingly in funerary art. At this same time come the native Etruscan sagas that were also translated into images: they are situated at the threshold between the historical tradition and the construction of a mythical past and as an endpoint to a development that saw myths, initially largely derived from Greece, become a substantial part of Etruscan culture.

Abbreviations

ET

Rix, H. et al. 1991. *Etruskische Texte. Editio minor*. Tübingen.

LIMC

Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae 1–8 (1981–97). Zurich.

LIMC 2009

LIMC Supplementum 2009. Zurich.

ThesCRA

Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum 1–8 (2004–2012). Los Angeles.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Emphasis is placed here on recent literature in English, especially works that largely treat individual groups of material and address fundamental questions. On individual mythological figures, *LIMC* – which includes separate Etruscan sections for some entries – should be consulted. Recent literature on the art objects that are discussed in this chapter and included in *LIMC* can be found in the *LIMC/ThesCRA*-database: <http://www.limc.ch/public/Default.aspx>.

Hampe and Simon 1964 is a pioneering work on the interpretation of Etruscan representations of Greek myths, especially from the second half of the sixth century when they differ considerably from contemporary Greek illustrations. For the first time in the scholarship, Etruscan knowledge of Greek texts is postulated. Massa-Pairault 1999 includes contributions on Greek myths in Italy (from Sicily to Bologna); the place of Greek myth in Etruria appears here in a broadened context. Bonfante and Swaddling 2006 provides a concise introduction to the subject of myths in Etruria, with the greater part of the text dedicated to Greek myths in Etruria. De Grummond 2006a focuses on Etruscan mythology, including stories about gods and Greek heroes which had been modified and further developed in Etruria. Lowenstam 2008 includes a section on “Etruria” in which he provides a detailed presentation of the most important art works with scenes of the Trojan War and a good summary of the scholarly discussion about how well the Etruscans knew Greek mythology and epic traditions.

Brilliant (1984: esp. 21–52 “Etruscan Cinerary Urns: Mythological Excerpts in Boxes”) investigates the relationship between cycles of pictorial narratives and the isolated mythological themes on Etruscan urns, while van der Meer 1995 is a comprehensive survey of Greek and Etruscan myths represented on Etruscan mirrors. Cianferoni, Iozzo, and Setari 2012 gathers the contributions to a colloquium, at the center of which stood the Chimaera of Arezzo. On this specific myth in Etruria there are articles by G. Camporeale, F. de Angelis, N. T. de Grummond, and P. G. Warden.

NOTES

¹ This chapter was translated by Robert Avila and Sinclair Bell.

- 2 Ariadne gives Theseus not only a ball of thread, but also a crown of light on his way into the labyrinth. For the discussion on the crown which Ariadne holds in her hand in many Greek illustrations (*LIMC* 3: add. pp. 1054. 1056 Ariadne nos. 28–34, 47a–49) and on the Cypselus-chest (Pausanias 5.19.1), see Coldstream 1968: 89.
- 3 Indirectly on the jug from Tragliatella and repeatedly on monuments of the first half of the sixth century (Krauskopf 1974: 10–13; *LIMC* 7: Theseus/These no. 15*20*25*–27.31 (C. Weber-Lehmann)).
- 4 List in Krauskopf 2011: 134 n. 11. More exhaustively Schweizer 2006: 240–285, with a discussion of all interpretations; de Grummond 2006a: 4f., fig. 1.7; Menichetti 2007; Riva 2010: 63–69, figs. 12–14; van der Meer 2011: 21–23 interprets the cloth as the cover held above the heads of bride and bridegroom in a Etruscan wedding ceremony.
- 5 Recently, a bucchero-fragment has been published by Rita Cosentino and Adriano Maggiani (Agostiniani, Colonna, and Maggiani 2010–13: 267–270 (R. Cosentino), 270–271 (A. Maggiani), with pls. 47–48), excavated in 2013 in the Banditaccia necropolis of Cerveteri, and identified as part of the olpe Brussels R 132 (group of the olpe from San Paolo: Rizzo and Martelli 1988/89 (1993): 19f., figs. 14–15). The fragment has the inscription Achile on a kind of kline and evidently belongs to a representation of Thetis and the Nereids mourning the dead Achilles. This is not only the earliest representation of Achilles in Etruria but the earliest of the scenes of lamentation of Achilles, implying, of course, the existence of earlier Greek models (cf. the rejuvenation of Jason on the olpe from S. Paolo). The scene, following at right, shows persons with lituus and scepter, either Etruscan dignitaries or Greek heroes with Etruscan insignia; in any case, a mixture of Greek and Etruscan iconography.
- 6 On the vase-painter's identification and localization: Martelli 1981; on the depictions: Hampe and Simon 1964: 59 pl. 27; *LIMC* 1: Achilleus no. 797* (A. Kossatz-Deissmann); *LIMC* 3: 781 Eos no. 294; *LIMC* 8: Zeus/Tinia no. 64*; d'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999: 129–143.
- 7 Among them, there might have been simple misunderstandings of Greek myth, too (for the thesis of the “banalizzazioni” see Steuernagel 1998: 11–12; Lowenstam 2008: 125 with lit.). But some of them, such as Herakles fighting Minotauros in the place of Theseus, have a long life and therefore cannot have been a mere error of a vase painter (*LIMC* 5: Herakles/Hercle nos. 329–330; de Grummond 2006a: 186, fig. 8.14).
- 8 Torelli 2002: 139: “nel sottolineare le virtù sportive di grande auriga del possessore, finisce per essere di fatto identica alle numerosissime rappresentazioni di carro.”

- 9 For Greek founders of cities and ancestors in Etruria: Briquel 1990: 339–342; for the foundation myths of Pyrgi from the Greek angle: Colonna 2000a: 265f.; corresponding tales in Rome: Wiseman 1974; Hölscher 1993: 77f.
- 10 Thalna: *LIMC* 7: p. 900–902 (G. Camporeale); *LIMC* 2009 p. 472 (S. Bruni); Thanr: *LIMC* 7: p. 908; *LIMC* 2009: p. 473 (C. Weber-Lehmann); Maras 1998: 173–192; Menerva/Athena: *LIMC* 8: s.v. Zeus/Tinia 40, 41*, 43*; de Grummond 2006a: 64, fig. 4.12.13; 81, fig. 5.10.
- 11 One could probably assume the same for the scene in which Achilles has just caught up with Troilos, who is fleeing on horseback, and catches him by his hair: Krauskopf 1974: 32 pl.s 14.2–15; *LIMC* 1: s.v. Achilleus/Achle no. 17, 19, 23–41.
- 12 Dionysos: *LIMC* 2: Aplu/Apollon no. 36*; *LIMC* 3: Dionysos/Fufluns no.76; *LIMC* 7: Semele no. 25. Mirror from Castel Viscardo: *LIMC* 2009: Adonis no. add. 7. Aphrodite/Turan no. add. 5; Apollon/Aplu no. add. 2; Eros (in Etruria) no. add. 1.
- 13 Domenici (2009: 175–196) uses the mytheme for the interpretation of the “Olta”-scenes, which she compares with a mirror on which Odysseus and Diomedes want to coerce the Trojan seer Helenos to speak by threatening to throw him into a well (*LIMC* 6: Odysseus/Uthuze no. 47, with the outmoded reading *helenei* (=Helena). Domenici fig. 8b), and therefore interprets the wolf-demon as a seer “*versipellis*.” But the Helenos story only makes sense when a normal well is depicted: Helenos lets himself be blackmailed, because he wants to stay alive and be drawn back up out of the well. Through a *mundus*, however, pass beings, whether deceased or demons, who rise up from, or sink back into the Netherworld. It is a sacred place which – in view of the Etruscans’ religious scrupulousness – could hardly have been used as an instrument for extorting a response: A consecration to the Netherworld couldn’t be revoked arbitrarily. The parallelism of the illustrations is, therefore, purely superficial: A *mundus* can, in fact, be marked as a puteal, but not every puteal opens itself to a *mundus*. Just as superficial is the comparison with Dolon, who disguises himself as a wolf, but does not have the power of changing his shape. In Greek myths, only those seers who have a relation to the sea can change their shape; they can elude any grasp, because they are sea-beings (like Thetis struggling with Peleus), and not because they possess the powers of prophesy. On the other hand, the relationship of wolves to the realm of death is not only logical, but suggests itself through a “catena cronologica ininterrotta del immaginario collettivo” (Torelli 1986: 194), the most meaningful link of which is Aita in the Tomba dell’Orco and in the Tomba Golini (*LIMC* 4: s.v. Hades/Aita no. 5*6*). This solid series of pictures cannot be replaced by a free play of associations.

- 14 Small (1982) discusses all of the sources but assumes the identity of Cacu and Cacus to be self-evident. Among other problems with this interpretation, there are linguistic reasons which argue against it: Cacus would have to be named in Etruscan Cace (e.g., Aulus–Avle), Cacu in Latin Caco (e.g., Aplu–Apollo).

CHAPTER 27

The “Taste” for Violence in Etruscan Art

Debunking the Myth

Alexandra A. Carpino

1. Introduction

Etruscan artists used, in a wide variety of contexts, different types of violent imagery as a form of visual communication. Well-known and frequently-illustrated examples include the relief sculpture from Temple A at Pyrgi (Haynes 2000: 178–181, fig. 154; Baglione 2013: 619–620) with its graphic depiction of scenes from the *Seven Against Thebes* epic, wall paintings from the Tomb of the Augurs (Tarquinia) and the François Tomb (Vulci) (Steingraber 2006: 92–94, 237–239, respectively), and the narratives found on numerous sarcophagi and urns produced from the fourth century on (Haynes 2000: 291–295, 365–367; van der Meer 2004).¹

In much past scholarship, these representations are frequently described not only as peculiarly Etruscan (as opposed to Greek) in taste but also as indicative of an unusual appetite for “savagery and its depiction” (see Lowenstam 2008: 128, n. 25). In his discussion of the Gigantomachy in Etruria, Francis Vian, for example, not only refers to “une manière beaucoup plus brutale” but also attributes this as being “en accord avec leur mentalité” (1949: 37). More recently, Giuliano Bonfante (1998: 5), when discussing the origin of cannibalism in Dante, wrote that “The Etruscans, as is well known, favored in their art bloody descriptions of horrors: a glance at the François Tomb is sufficient to prove it. Among all the Greek myths they preferred these.” Likewise, Robin Osborne (1998: 95) declared, “the painters of Tyrrhenian amphorae [a type of Athenian vase exported to Italy in great numbers] liked to emphasize violence ... these pots delight in horrific moments.” A. J. N. W. Prag (1985: 42) echoed this same sentiment in his discussion of the latter’s iconography: “the subject of many, even if a conventional Greek theme, seems to have been rendered in a suitably gory fashion to appeal to Etruscan taste ... Greek artists preferred to concentrate on some of the more exciting and less horrific aspects.”

Today, many scholars recognize that these views are inaccurate, reflecting oft-repeated but incorrect assumptions about the number and range of violent

images in Etruscan art, as well as a cultural bias that failed to acknowledge the prevalence and use of similar imagery in works of art from the Greek world. But, as Guy Hedreen recently observed in his discussion of representations of the murder of Troilos in ancient vase painting, dramatic killings, cannibalism or dismemberment – to name just a few of the types of violent imagery portrayed in the classical world – were neither just the prerogative of Etruscan artists nor Greek art intended for the Etruscan market: “it is hard to claim that human sacrifice is a specifically Etruscan taste, ... when so many representations of human sacrifice occur in Greek myth, literature, and art” (Hedreen 2012: 141).² In his 2003 study of the Tyrrhenian vases, Jeroen Kluiver also debunks the misconceptions about their iconography promoted in the work of past scholars, especially the idea that it was exceptionally harsh and cruel. Only four vases in a corpus of nearly 500 – an amphora by the Timiades Painter depicting the Sacrifice of Polyxena; two vases with a beheaded Troilos, and one with the murder of Eryphile – depict what can be characterized as “extreme violence.” Nevertheless, these four vessels are among the most illustrated of the products created in the Tyrrhenian workshop, promoted as the iconographic norm rather than for depicting special and unusual scenes. As Kluiver observes, “the question asked by various observers whether the ‘Tyrrhenian’ painters made their scenes ‘uncommonly cruel’ to appeal to alleged Etruscan taste (as inferred, for instance, from the violent games depicted in some Etruscan tombs) is clearly based on an incorrect assumption about the amount of bloodshed in ‘Tyrrhenian’ imagery” (2003: 102).

Understanding why any culture – particularly an ancient one – would choose to depict violent imagery in their art is a challenge in and of itself, but for the Etruscan material, it is made more difficult by the absence of literary evidence by Etruscan authors that records how they viewed their world and the people who lived in it. Instead, its meanings and messages must be decoded and then reconstructed through the careful analysis of archaeological, artistic, and epigraphic data without recourse to modern prejudices. In all ancient Mediterranean cultures, iconography was not only culturally constructed but also intricately tied to the function and context of the works of art on which it appears. Much has also been written about the use of Greek myth and narratives in Etruria (see [Chapter 26](#)), the content of most of the violent imagery found on Etruscan art. The current consensus acknowledges “Etruscan agency in the manipulation of Greek myths ... in order to fit [them] in with pre-existing social and cultural institutions;” in this way, their recontextualizations of a foreign culture’s stories produce “new cultural forms ... [with their own] local systems of ... meaning” (Izzet 2010: 39, 41, 43; see also Small 2008: 62–63, and [Chapter 24](#)).³

With these ideas in mind, this chapter reviews the three principal contexts in which violent imagery appears in Etruria: the sanctuary, the tomb, and the

home. The analysis considers how the selected scenes not only relate to their specific locations but also to the ideologies of their consumers, the elite men and women who commissioned and paid for them and for whom they must have had a strong emotional resonance. Even if we cannot grasp completely the multiple messages communicated by the different types of graphic imagery found in Etruria, their patrons' conscious and deliberate iconographic choices cannot be divorced from their values and beliefs. This chapter also includes a case study focusing on the use and function of violent imagery on the reverses of engraved bronze mirrors, luxurious artifacts that had both practical and symbolic functions, first within the private sphere of the home and later in the funerary environment. Mirrors were not only associated with adornment, gift exchange, status, wealth, marriage, and prophecy, but were also treasured gifts within the tomb for many wealthy Etruscans. And, while their iconography most frequently projected uplifting and inspirational themes designed to inspire their owners and reinforce social and cultural expectations, tragic and violent narratives were also used. This chapter analyzes the use and function of the latter in their domestic context.

2. The Contexts of Violent Imagery in Etruria

Contextual information is critical not only for understanding all works of art from antiquity, but especially with respect to those with iconography that appears peculiar or even distasteful to modern eyes. Meaning and interpretation most likely varied as much as the stories selected, with associations and understanding just as dependent on function and context as on their beholders' ages, statuses, gender, and wealth, none of which was static (see further, Izzet 2007b: 58). Moreover, all graphic imagery in Etruria (as well as elsewhere) – from the iconography of murder to scenes of suicide and human sacrifice – represents conscious choices, one of many available to artists who were asked to explore multiple themes and concepts in contexts such as the sanctuary, the tomb, and the home for their customers.

The Religious Sphere

The best known work of violent imagery in a religious context is the painted, high relief terracotta panel (see [Figure 26.2](#)) that originally covered the end of the central roof beam on the back of Temple A at Pyrgi, a multicultural, international sanctuary located along the Tyrrhenian coast that functioned as the harbor emporium for Caere. The coroplast depicted two scenes from the *Seven Against Thebes*, a cycle of particularly dark stories that were of great

interest to the Etruscans (Simon 2013: 503; also [Chapter 26](#)). On one side, Athena watches Tydeus commit an act of cannibalism on the living body of his enemy, Melanippos, while Zeus, who dominates the center of the composition, charges to the right, ready to hurl his thunderbolt at Kapaneus, who had boasted that the god could not stop him from scaling the walls of Thebes. The violence on display – which, in the words of Jean-René Jannot (2005: 111), is “shocking, ... raging ..., terrifying” – can only be understood as intentional: an artistic (rather than a realistic) device used to create an everlasting and psychologically powerful impression in the minds of worshippers and visitors alike.

Given that these scenes enhanced the open pediment of a temple in a sanctuary that catered not only to Etruscans but also to an international and constantly fluctuating audience, they must have reinforced beliefs and values important to the buildings’ patrons. On a most basic level, no one who had seen the plaque would have been left in the dark as to the superhuman powers of divinities such as Tinia and Menerva, as Zeus and Athena were known in Etruria. Their actions, above all, are at the fore of these stories, reiterating the Etruscan belief that each of their gods was, as Ingrid Krauskopf (2013: 517) and others have noted, a *divinità atto*. While much Etruscan visual art depicts them “striving for peace and harmony” (Simon 2006: 57) and/or cooperating with each other (Krauskopf 2013: 524), these deities also wielded an incredible amount of power, and the Etruscans did not shy away from showing publicly the often horrific consequences to humans of divine displeasure. Today, we can only imagine the types of conversations that this unusual and dramatic *interpretatio etrusca* would have generated long after worshippers and visitors had left Pyrgi. In addition to foregrounding the fate of two warriors – men not unlike many of the sanctuary’s users and visitors – its expressive and spirited style further increases the power of its messages about hubris and arrogance. It leaves no doubt that the gods were not far away and that there were clear and terrifying consequences in store for anyone who defied or challenged them (Bonfante and Swaddling 2006: 23; Baglione 2013: 619–620). In this way, it corresponds to standard temple decoration during the Archaic period in Etruria, a time when many religious buildings displayed vivid narratives of admonition and divine punishments (see further, Jannot 2005: 121).

In addition, Maria Paola Baglione (2013) and others (e.g., Jannot 2005: 111) have argued that the decision to select these particular subjects for a religious building built and decorated c.470–460 (i.e., after the 474 defeat of the Etruscans off the coast of Cumae) at a site that functioned as the emporium of Caere could have been much more complex, with its message “as much civic as religious [since] such distinctions were meaningless in ancient Etruria” (Jannot 2005: 111). Political interpretations, for example, focus on Caere’s “desire ... to enshrine before foreign visitors the complete change that had

occurred in the government of the city [e.g., after the ouster of Thefarie Velianas]” (Baglione 2013: 619–620), or on “the growing menace of the rulers of Syracuse” (Jannot 2005: 111).

Thus, although it is impossible to know exactly “how the Etruscans ... read this visual myth and the degree to which they saw it as historical, mythological or allegorical” (Edlund-Berry 2008: 79), the Pyrgi plaque underscores the importance of analyzing images of violence in Etruria from the perspective of their physical and historical contexts: the scene was as carefully planned as the temple itself, and to say that that its iconography merely reflects a supposed Etruscan “taste” for violence and gore discounts any meaningful forethought or planning by its designer and the temple’s sponsors. Such a view, moreover, only reinforces anti-Etruscan biases that do not give their artists, or even the Etruscans themselves, equal due with respect to issues of originality and creativity (see further, [Chapter 24](#)).

The Funerary Environment

In Etruria, funerary art – especially the friezes carved or painted on sarcophagi and urns produced between the fourth and second centuries – includes numerous scenes that depict violent deaths, from the double murder of Klytaimnestra and Aigisthos and the fratricide of the Theban brothers, Eteokles and Polyneikes, to the sacrifices of Polyxena, Iphigeneia, and the Trojan prisoners. The so-called Sarcophagus of the Poet from Tarquinia, now in the Vatican (van der Meer 2004: 49–52 and figs. 24–25), for example, contains three of these subjects, but none can be viewed as reflections their owner’s taste for murder (including matricide) and human sacrifice. Rather, when these violent narratives are analyzed and understood within the context for which they were produced – the tomb – they can be clearly seen as functioning on a variety of symbolic – not realistic – levels within the funerary sphere (see further, Simon 2013: 508).

P. Gregory Warden has also cautioned against interpreting Etruscan funerary imagery at face value, arguing that “sacrifice and death [may have] had a very different meaning to the Etruscans, that possibly for the Etruscan elite death is not quite a dead end, so to speak” (2008a: 110). Other scholars correlate the violent and often bloody images in Etruscan funerary art, particularly from the late Classical and Hellenistic periods, with local rituals and beliefs wherein the shedding of blood, either literally (via animal sacrifice) or symbolically (via an image), ensured immortality and, possibly, deification (Bonfante and Swaddling 2006: 55; de Grummond 2006: 209; Warden 2009; Camporeale 2009; for more on actual sacrificial rites, see Rafanelli 2013: 580). Still others seem them as more personal expressions related to the values and ideologies of the deceased, or to the disturbance and disorder that their overall themes

(e.g., war, family conflicts, violent death, issues of succession and loss of power, etc.) – all of which were removed from reality by being drawn from the Hellenic repertoire – bring to survivors (Steuernagel 1998; de Angelis 1999, 2014; see further, [Chapter 26](#)). As noted by Soi Agelidis, the Etruscans “thus attempted to express the horror in the face of the death of a human” (2013: 50), especially in comparison to the presumed serenity of the deceased, who is often depicted reclining on the lid of the sarcophagus or urn.

Although the Tombs of the Augurs (Tarquinia; c.520; Steingraber 2006: 92–94) and the François Tomb (c.350; Steingraber 2006: 237–239) are frequently cited as symptomatic of the Etruscans’ alleged taste for violence, both blood sports and images of murder/sacrifice are rarities rather than the norm in this particular medium (as was also the case with the iconography of the Tyrrhenian amphorae discussed above). The Tomb of the Bulls at Tarquinia (c.540–530; Steingraber 2006: 91–92), for example, contains the only surviving Archaic example of a violent mythological subject on the wall of a tomb chamber, and most scholars agree that this unique representation of Achilles poised to ambush and kill the young Troilos, sacrificial knife in hand, in a space evocative of the god Aplu, was chosen for its ritual implications. That is, it was selected for the tomb’s founder, Aranth Spurianas, and his family, because Troilos’s fate, which was well-known in Etruria, effectively evoked the rite of sacrifice and the passage from life to death. When depicted in the funerary environment, which the Etruscans may have viewed as a “physical space that mediated, literally and figuratively, between the world of the living and the dead” (Warden 2008a: 107–108), the imagery connects to actual rituals and beliefs about sacrifice, blood, and passage, all of which were necessary in order for the dead to reach the afterlife safely (see further, Krauskopf 2006; Lowenstam 2008: 138–148; Warden 2009: 213–214; Hedreen 2012).

Likewise, the Phersu scenes in the Tombs of the Augurs and the Tomb of the Olympic Games (c.520 and 510, respectively; Steingraber 2006: 98–99; Thuillier 2013: 835–836) do not display a penchant for meaningless violence and nor can they be divorced from the imagery that surrounds them, which sometimes includes a second Phersu dancing alone or to music. In the former tomb, for example, elite men dominate the iconography, standing in various positions as they display a range of gestures and emotions while slaves wrestle, box, sprint, or carry symbols of political power (e.g., a folding chair). Two different Phersu figures appear, although only one – on the right wall – oversees the contest in which a hooded and already bleeding male tries to beat off an attacking dog while hindered by its long leash; the other Phersu dances alone on the left wall. In the Tomb of the Olympic Games, the scene is less well-preserved but also shows “a hooded man armed with a club who is being attacked by a vicious dog, spurred on by a masked executioner [e.g., *Phersu*]” (Thuillier 2013: 835). As in the Tomb of the Augurs, this figure is associated

with elite male imagery: banqueting scenes and athletic contests surround the human–animal contest. The pediment in the Tomb of the Augurs also contains bloody imagery: there, two felines, a lion and a panther, attack an antelope. In addition, the scene on the front wall, near the entrance, includes “masked figures involved in a dangerous game of strength with a long cord that ties them both by the neck and threatens to strangle either of them” (Haynes 2000: 233).

Not surprisingly, scholarly attention has focused on the Phersu scenes in both tombs – which have been described as “grim,” “gruesome,” and “cruel” – usually to the extent of downplaying the appearance of this character in two other Tarquinian tombs (Pulcinella and the Cock) where he appears solely as a dancer. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the Phersu contest represents a myth, akin to the story of Actaeon, or that Phersu was thought of as a Charun or underworld “demon.” Instead, he is a masked performer, an actor, who had a role to play in funerary ritual: “The constant wearing of a mask with the same features implies that he is impersonating a high power associated with music, funerary rituals and theatrical performances, a character closely related to Dionysos/Fufluns” (Avramidou 2009: 74).

Likewise, there is no indication that the blindfolded men under attack will die; rather, they are shown not only alive but also full of vigor, despite their handicap, remaining upright rather than collapsing to the earth (the latter pose is usually described as “a visual signifier of sacrifice or death in Etruscan art” (Warden 2009: 208 and n. 27)). Jannot comments on this contrast (or “double character”) between the “extreme vitality, activity, force, and dynamism” of some of the depicted rites in surviving funerary iconography and their associated dangers (see also Scheffer 2003). Moreover, he considers the attacking dog to be “a chthonian animal sacred to Calu and Aita” (Jannot 2005: 50). Warden also discusses the highly constructed nature of these funerary images, arguing that the juxtaposition between the bloody animal combat in the pediment is equally as significant as “the symbolism of pitting human against beast in a blood sport” (2009: 214) on the tombs’ walls. Given these perspectives, it becomes clear, once again, that the depiction of such bloody and life-threatening contests within the funerary environment – along with energetic wresting, brutal and bloody boxing matches (e.g., as in the Tomb of the Funeral Bed at Tarquinia), harrowing chariot races, and dangerous acrobatics – do not – despite their emphasis on “realism” – represent real-life spectacles: rather, they are evocations of “the funeral games in the ceremonies held at the funeral of the founder of the tomb” (Thuillier 2013: 838; on chariot races see also now Banducci 2014). That is, they represent symbolic, and specifically ritualistic aristocratic images whose function in the funerary environment was “to revitalize the dead, to bring them, by the shedding of blood, a supplement to life” (Jannot 2005: 50).⁴ In this way, the violence and blood function as animating devices that “give

spice to the spectacle and its representation” (Thuillier 2013: 839).

The scenes painted on the walls of tombs in Tarquinia and elsewhere (e.g., Vulci) were private, rather than public, and when viewed as a whole – in conjunction with the rest of their specifically Etruscan iconography – they fit into a corpus of narratives that the elite used to assure their own and their descendants’ smooth passage into the afterlife as well as their immortality (Jannot 2005: 52–53; Warden 2009: 207, 214). As articulated by Krauskopf, these funerary images – although grim by modern western standards – would have been completely suitable in the funerary sphere since they reflected “the belief that blood was necessary to placate the anger of the dead on the one hand, and to strengthen and to protect their souls magically against the dangers of the transition to the Afterlife on the other” (Krauskopf 2006: 76).

The Home

In the domestic sphere, stories adapted from numerous Hellenic and native contexts functioned on a personal (i.e., individual) level on a wide variety of household possessions, from painted vases and carved gems to engraved cistae and bronze mirrors, most of which were used for a variety of purposes before they were transformed into burial goods. A number of narratives – from the suicide of Ajax to Menerva holding the dismembered limb of a giant – appear on multiple types of domestic artifacts. Ajax’s final moment, for example, was selected as the subject not only of vases but also of gems and mirrors, reflecting, by their sheer number – exceeding Greek representations of the theme – that this subject resonated particularly to the consumers and users of these personal objects. In his study of this imagery, Nigel Spivey argued that the Etruscans must not have considered this Homeric hero to be a figure of ridicule or shame; nor did they consider his suicide to be a morally reprehensible form of death (Spivey 1992: 241). Rather, Spivey’s analysis suggests that the Etruscan elite saw him as both noble and a man of honor, whose final act represented a virtue that was to be admired since, unlike in Greece, the name of the family counted for more than the name of the city state. To Spivey, these deliberate celebrations of suicide in the domestic sphere suggest an acknowledgement in Etruria that in certain situations, suicide could have been an honorable act signaling familial loyalty.

On gems, Tydeus (Tute) and Kapaneus (Capne) also enjoyed “a greater popularity in Etruria than in Greece” (Hansson 2013: 934), and two fifth-century scarabs made from carnelian and agate, both now in New York, depict the warriors in contorted poses that evoke “a sense of dramatic and sudden violence” (De Puma 2013a: 282 and figs. 2.5 and 7.78). Exactly why figures whose behavior was not positive were chosen as gem iconography has puzzled some scholars. Nevertheless, because Kapaneus is often shown being

struck by Zeus's thunderbolt, it has been suggested that his popularity may have had something to do with his death by lightning, an important tool of divination in Etruria and one that may have been connected to the amuletic function of the gems (see further, [Chapter 26](#)).

Hansson (2013: 939) also notes that a significant number of ring stones from the fourth century were decorated with what seem “to be *Maschialismos* scenes [e.g., the deliberate mutilation of an enemies' body] or severed heads ...,” which may have evoked the concept of human sacrifice which some Etruscans practiced as a religious ritual (Bonfante 1984). Richard De Puma discusses an example now in New York which depicts an upright nude male holding “the severed torso and arms of another male figure” (2013a: 286 and fig. 7.100). While “we cannot ... totally exclude that some of the gems show the harsh treatment of enemy bodies, ... [they] do not usually show a battle context” (Scheffer 2006: 513), suggesting that some of these scenes could reference Tydeus while the severed heads could represent Orpheus or another type of oracular head.

Given their domestic context and use, these particular gem images most likely functioned as cautionary tales warning their elite owners about the varying consequences of transgressing the boundaries of acceptable behavior during life (boundaries of all types were important to the Etruscans; see further, Edlund-Berry 2013: 557–565). Such behavior was a risk, leading to destabilization and tension within families, and for this reason, these stories would have had an important social power, one that operated on a specifically personal level, with the figures represented serving as exempla (both positive and negative) intended for daily reflection.

3. Case Study: Violent Imagery on Engraved Bronze Mirrors

Perhaps the least understood images of violence and death in Etruscan art are the matricides, dismemberments, decapitations, fratricides, and suicides, to name just a few themes, that appear on the reverses of engraved bronze mirrors.⁵ These functional luxury goods were first manufactured in the late sixth century and produced until the mid-second century. Their use during life – as hand-held and mobile grooming implements, status symbols, oracular devices, etc. – stimulated their manufacture, but, like much Etruscan art, their archaeological context was the tomb: all known examples have been recovered from this environment rather than any domestic contexts. While their findspots suggest that any mirrors with bloodily themed iconography could easily be classified as funerary in content and meaning (de Grummond 2000c: 29), these narratives appear on artifacts whose primary function was

practical (e.g., adornment, grooming, divination, etc.) and which most scholars believe were acquired as wedding gifts (de Grummond 2000a; Serra Ridgway 2000: 416; De Puma 2001: 27; de Grummond 2013: 551; Bonfante 2013: 431; De Puma 2013b: 1056; Rasmussen 2013: 677). In fact, recent assessments of the word *malena*, once thought to be the word for mirror, have now suggested that it means “wedding gift” (De Puma 2013b: 1056 with references). Moreover, while the consumers of these artifacts were the Etruscan aristocracy, their audience was much broader: elite women and men, along with their children, slaves, and friends, could have handled or encountered them on a daily basis before the artifacts were transitioned into grave goods⁶ (for more on the nature of the Etruscan household, see [Chapter 13](#)).

As Vedia Izzet (2007b: 58; 2012) and others (Lowenstam 2008: 152; Carpio 2011; De Puma 2013b) have demonstrated, the iconography of the Etruscans’ mirrors – the most important and distinctive form of pictorial art in Etruria – was not just a form of entertainment or the focus of erudite conversation in the domestic sphere. Nor did the narratives provide their users with “snapshots of ancient lives” (Izzet 2012: 76). Instead, those chosen for visualization were carefully selected for their ability to remind their owners of the duties and expectations required of them during life. For this reason, stories that promoted ideal family values or that cautioned against behavior that inverted or subverted social and cultural paradigms of femininity and masculinity became the norm, with various figures from the legendary past and the divine world projected as exempla for reflection. These figures ranged from Achle/Achilles, the greatest of the Greek legendary heroes, and Hercle/Herakles, an adventurous, strong mortal who overcame numerous dangers on his way to apotheosis, to Turan, goddess of beauty, adornment, sex, reproduction, and child-rearing, whose love and “marriage” to Atunis/Adonis served as a model for Etruscan couples (Izzet 2007a: 121; Bonfante 2013: 432–433). Not surprisingly, romance and seduction – presumably to stimulate reproduction and the continuity of the family – were popular themes, with characters such as Pele/Peleus and Thethis/Thetis or Fufluns/Dionysos and Areatha/Ariadne, to name just two couples, promoted as models for daily contemplation. At the same time, a sinister element – namely the notion of an early or untimely death – was not avoided in mirror iconography, as witnessed by scenes showing couples such as Alcestei/Alcestis and Atmite/Admetos and Atalanta and Meleager whose unions were shattered by individual actions and decisions that resulted in the death of one of the lovers. Thus, stories about the darker sides of human and divine behavior, and themes such as transgression and hubris, resonated just as much with the engravers’ clientele as did lighter themes, such as bridal preparation, bathing, and seduction.

Chronologically, mirror iconography showing violence is most common on artifacts produced between the mid-fifth and third centuries, with the majority

dating to the fourth century, a period of great innovation and creativity in mirror design and decoration (see further, van der Meer 1995: 238). They also include a much narrower range of subject matter than that found in art specifically connected to the funerary environment. Popular funerary themes such as the Theban fratricide or Achilles's murder of Troilos appear only sporadically, while scenes of human sacrifice (e.g., the stories of Polyxena, Iphigenia, and the Trojan prisoners) are absent. Moreover, when the mirrors' iconography is compared to standard funerary representations, there is a distinct absence of blood and only rarely a "demon" or chthonian character waiting in the wings. For example, Vanth – one of the Etruscans' spirits who helped the dead on their journey to the afterlife – appears on only three extant mirrors. Charun, her ugly male counterpart, is unattested, despite the popularity of his appearance in funerary art produced from the mid-late fifth century on, along with Culsu, who was associated with passages and doors, and Tuchulcha, who appears in the Tomb of the Orcus (Haynes 2000: fig. 223). The only other named "demonic" character that appears in mirror iconography is Nathum, a hideous creature of uncertain gender who stands behind Urusthe/Orestes as he avenges his father's murder on a mid-fifth century mirror now in Berlin (Carpino 2011: 11 and fig. 5). The presence of this chthonian figure, however, is easily explained by the mirror's iconography of matricide: its attributes (bearded snakes entwined around the arms, flame-like, tousled hair, an open mouth with an upward-pointing boar tusk) demonstrate an ingenious conflation of one of the Etruscans' ubiquitous underworld "demons" with a Greek Fury; in this way, the character serves not only to localize the subject matter – it waits in the wings for Urusthe to complete his deed – but also as a reference to the future, to the time when Urusthe needs to be absolved of his unnatural crime. A winged but far less hideous chthonic character appears behind Hercle on a late fourth-century mirror now in Florence that depicts his confrontation with an armed Amazon, presumably Hippolyta/Heplenta (van der Meer 1995: 16 and fig. 4; Fischer-Graf 1980: 94). Because Hercle's aggression against the Amazon queen resulted in her death in most accounts, we once again find an *interpretatio etrusca* wherein this character helps "to [not only] nationalize the Greek subject matter" (Steingraber 2006: 192) but also reiterate an Etruscan custom.

Because space precludes a full examination of all of the violent narratives that appear in this category of mirror iconography, the analysis below focuses on three themes: dismemberment, fighting couples, and decapitation, none of which has been analyzed in depth in prior scholarship.⁷

Dismemberment

The great cosmic battle between the Olympians and the hubristic giants was a

popular subject not only in Greece – where it frequently signified the struggle that civilization and reason waged against the forces of darkness – but also in Etruria where its appearance dates back to the Orientalizing period. Mirror engravers, however, depicted only two deities taking part in the Gigantomachy: Laran, god of war, and Menerva, a goddess akin to Athena but with much broader powers and functions (e.g., the ability to throw lightning, to name just one; see further, Jannot 2005: 147–149; de Grummond 2006: 71–78). On a late fifth-century mirror from Populonia (de Grummond 2000b: 259; de Grummond 2006: fig. V.38), Laran, outfitted in full military gear, attacks a wild-haired, bearded warrior named Celsclan (literally, the son of Cel, the goddess of the earth). He grips his fleeing opponent by the shoulder, his drawn sword a more effective weapon than the giant’s boulder, another motif that confirms the association of the scene with the Gigantomachy.

Menerva’s confrontation with the giants is far more dramatic and brutal than Laran’s: in what can only be described as an *interpretatio etrusca*, a mid-fourth century mirror now in the Louvre (Rebuffat-Emmanuel 1997: no. 14) shows the helmeted goddess with wings, swooping over a nude but helmeted warrior who has collapsed to the ground, a shield protecting his left side. She grasps his right wrist with her left hand and grips a section of his free upper arm with her right, an action that has contributed to his collapse. Mario Del Chiaro describes her as “lean[ing] forward in intense and gruesome anticipation of the task before her” (1970: 350). A late fourth-century mirror found in Perugia and known since 1813 ([Figure 27.1](#)) (Frascarelli 1995: no. 3) shows the aftermath of this airborne confrontation: here, a fully-grounded Menerva holds the amputated right arm of her foe – a man inscribed Akrathe – in her right hand, waving it above her head as she gets ready to spear him to death in the chest. Akrathe kneels on the ground, holding a large boulder in his left hand as blood oozes out of the empty socket along his right side.



Figure 27.1 Engraved mirror with Menrva and Akrathe, late fourth century BCE. Bronze. Drawing:

Frascarelli: 1995: fig. 3a.

Similar visualizations of Menerva's unique and exclusively Etruscan fighting method in the Gigantomachy appear on other types of artifacts from the domestic sphere, including a black-figure hydria by the Micali Painter from the end of the sixth century, a thin bronze relief that once decorated a small household box from the beginning of the fifth century and a red-figure stamnos from Vulci, produced during the late fourth/early third century. On the latter, which may have been manufactured at Caere (Del Chiaro 1970: 351), the goddess is helmeted and also carries a shield. She uses her right foot to push against the calf of a collapsing warrior, and waves, above her head, his amputated left arm. The Perugia mirror, interestingly enough, is more realistic than these other artifacts, given the engraver's depiction of the blood flowing out of the empty socket. Gems manufactured during the fifth century and now in New York and Paris (Vian 1949; De Puma 2013a: 282–283 and fig. 7.80) also depict the goddess with wings, as on the Paris mirror, holding a

dismembered limb – an arm with the hand still attached – in her left hand, as on the Perugia mirror.

Why was such a violent and gory form of fighting selected for this goddess in Etruria? In her study “Man-killers and Their Victims,” Beth Cohen notes that in fifth-century Greece the “fate of dismemberment was worse than death” (2000a: 106). Did Menerva’s fighting method, therefore, remind the mirrors’ owners of something in particular, either mutilations that took place on the battlefield, or practices related to the concepts of *akroteriasmos* or *maschalismos* (Scheffer 2006: 512; De Puma 2013a: 286)? To most scholars, these dismemberment scenes have nothing to do with a form of actual warfare (Hanfmann 1937: 470, n. 32; Scheffer 2006; for more on the theme of mutilation in the *Iliad*, see Segal 1971). Rather, as Charlotte Scheffer (2006: 513) has observed, “it is easier to see it as a sign of her superhuman strength and power to debilitate her opponents than as an Etruscan way of fighting,” an idea that builds upon Del Chiaro’s assessment from the 1970s: “the representation of the goddess with so shocking a weapon – an arm wrenched from the body of her opponent – is a simple visual statement to superhuman power, the ferocious and merciless reaction expected of an Olympian deity aroused to anger or combat” (Del Chiaro 1970: 351). To these scholars, therefore, this *interpretatio etrusca* not only stressed Menerva’s central role in the Gigantomachy but it also celebrated both her incredible physical strength and her position as a *divinità atto* in the Etruscan pantheon, where she played a critical role in the maintenance of order in the universe. It could also be connected to myths of a similar type, e.g., the stories of Pentheus or Marsyas, which involved either dismemberment or a flaying.

The conceptualization of the giants as warriors, moreover, was most likely not arbitrary: as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Carpino 2009), fighting warriors have a long history in Etruscan art, with some imagery selected to celebrate exemplary heroes from the Trojan, Theban, and Argonaut cycles who exuded military valor and others to caution against transgressions that resulted in a negative fate. On mirrors, Menerva was celebrated as a goddess with the ability to grant or deny immortality to her protégés: she also had no trouble condemning hubristic mortals to eternal death, as already seen in the Pyrgi relief. When viewed in this light, it is possible to interpret the mirror’s iconography as a cautionary tale directed to the owners of these artifacts: harmony and stability, not strife or disorder, were the ideals expected of men and women in the domestic sphere, ideals that underscored their paradigms not only of manhood and womanhood but also of marriage. Marriage was a time for celebrating the power of one’s family and one’s ancestry, of affirming one’s identity and social status. But fame and power had to be controlled, subjected to divine will and authority. The iconography of these mirrors, therefore, presented a choice to be contemplated daily, functioning as a dramatic and powerful reminder that any attempt to subvert or invert this

ideology could have severe consequences not only for an individual but also their entire family and the generations to come. In this way, Menerva's vivid dismemberment of a hubristic giant not only celebrates her superhuman powers but also her special relationship with a clientele who valued her ability to bring them luck and prosperity through her many divine powers.

Fighting Couples

In addition to fighting warriors (e.g., Achilles and Memnon, Ajax and Hektor, Tydeus and Melanippos, Polyneikes and Eteokles, etc.) and battles such as the Gigantomachy, representations of men and women in conflict make up the majority of the violent imagery on the reverses of mirrors, imagery that Marjatta Nielsen has described as "tactless" for artifacts associated with weddings and the toilette (Nielsen 2003: 39). Some of these scenes – such as the wrestling match between Peleus and Atalanta, or the confrontation between Odysseus (Uthste) and Circe (Cerca) (a mid-late fourth century BCE example from Vetulonia is now in New York (De Puma 2013a: 177 and fig. 6.6); another example is now in Cambridge (Nicholls 1993: no. 11); see also Fischer-Graf 1980: V44–46) – have happy endings, with the latter narrative belonging to a subgroup that portrays female characters – not just Circe but also Helen, Hesione, and Cassandra – being threatened or confronted by violent men but never killed (see further, Nagy 2009). In the latter images, the themes of love, lust and beauty intersect directly with the violence depicted, as can be seen on a mirror from Caere, now in the British Museum. There, the engraver depicts Meneleus/Menle, who still has a firm grasp on Helen/Elinai's hair, abandoning his desire to murder his unfaithful ex-wife with his sword when he catches sight of her beautiful body, revealed through the drapery that has fallen down around her thighs. As L. Bouke van der Meer (1995: 112) has observed, we find a narrative where beauty has "soften[ed] [a] revengeful aggressor," thereby lending it "a soteric character" and highlighting "the power of love." It is no coincidence, either, that the engraver depicts Turan as the figure who pulls Meneleus back from going forward with his deed.

In other instances, such as in the Amazonomachy, battles between men and women – whether Herakles and Hippolyta (his ninth labor in search of her girdle) or Achilles and Penthesileia – had the most negative consequence of all for the female characters: death. Engravers, however, avoided gore in these "fighting couple" images, preferring to depict the moment before the fatal blow is struck, with the women captured forever in a liminal state, on that threshold between life and death. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, even Orestes's matricide is bloodless in mirror iconography, with Klytaimnestra's tragic and very human fate suspended for eternity (Carpino 2011: 24). A beautifully engraved mirror from Vulci and now in Berlin ([Figure 27.2](#)), most

likely manufactured at the beginning of the fourth century, is a good example of this type (Zimmer 1995: no. 15; Franken 2013: fig. 8.5). It poignantly illustrates the tragically brief “romance” between two of the greatest warriors from classical mythology, the Amazon queen, Penthesileia/Pentasilia, and the Greek hero, Achilles/Achle. In the medallion, Pentasilia appears on the right, in profile, protected by intricate armor (helmet, cuirass, and greaves). Her size indicates that she is, at first glance, the equal of her opponent, who does not tower over her. The engraver selects a moment prior to her stabbing, thus eliminating the need to depict any bloodshed. At the same time, the scene’s deviation from any sense of a real battle is made manifest by a number of visual clues, most significantly, the fact that Pentasilia is unarmed but adorned with a necklace. In this simple but important way, the most valorous of the warrior queens has been domesticated: she has no weapon and thereby becomes a woman who Achle desires, despite her choice to act as a warrior and to duel with him. Pentasilia tilts her head back, opens her mouth, and stretches out her right hand in Achle’s direction, her only defense a plea for mercy from the sword that he is poised to plunge into her chest. The pathos of her features and body language are also visible on Achle’s face, but rather than grabbing her by the hair – the usual gesture for what Helen Nagy (2009) has termed “the lunging aggressor” – his left arm is wrapped around her waist. Thus, Achilles’s drawn sword is no longer a true weapon – designed for lethal purposes – but, like its use in other “fighting couple” scenes such as Odysseus’s confrontation with Circe or Menelaus’s attack on Helen – it functions instead as an erotic motif.



Figure 27.2 Engraved bronze mirror with Achle and Pentasila, early fourth century BCE. From Vulci. Berlin, Antikensammlung.

Photo: © Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

These details – when combined with their embrace on the battlefield – not

only point to the highly constructed nature of the scene (e.g., women in Etruria did not fight in wars), but they also confirm why this duel became an appropriate and acceptable form of mirror iconography. Although recorded only in a second-century CE source (Apollodorus; Swaddling 2001: 32; Stahre 1998: 160), a version where the hero is touched by the Amazon's beauty and falls in love with her right before striking the fatal blow was known and portrayed much earlier, suggesting that what Etruscan consumers and users saw in this medallion was the birth and death of a perfectly suited couple who were fated, tragically, never to be together. Themes about star-crossed lovers or love found and then lost, moreover, can be correlated with other less solemn variations that engravers placed on mirrors (e.g., the stories of Turan and Atunis, Alcestis and Admetus, Meleager and Atalanta), making it a narrative with broad appeal, perhaps even because of its fantasy, as well as one appropriate for an artifact with multiple functions during life and after death. In addition, it can be correlated to the "open eroticism" found on other mirrors (e.g., an example that shows an embracing Tinia and Semla; Bonfante 2000: fig. 9) or in other works of Etruscan art, such as the married couple Larth Tetnies and his wife Tanchvil Tarnai, whose love for each other is captured for all eternity on the lid of their fourth-century sarcophagus from Vulci (Rowland 2008: 158).

Decapitation

Quite different in tone from the Berlin mirror discussed above is the dramatic and unusual scene of a fighting couple that appears on a small unprovenanced tang mirror ([Figure 27.3](#)) from the late fourth century, possibly produced at Vulci and now in Boston (De Puma 1993: no. 26). Against a blank background, two figures are locked in an intense struggle: a heroically nude youth appears on the left, looking away as he slashes the throat of the fit nude female on the right. She attempts, unsuccessfully, to release the grip her attacker has on her hair. Despite the absence of inscriptions, the young man's pose and attributes (e.g., his *kibisis* and distinctive curved dagger) designate the scene as Perseus's decapitation of Medusa, as Richard De Puma (1993: 45) has suggested.



Figure 27.3 Engraved bronze mirror with Perseus and Medusa, late fourth century BCE.

Photo: By permission of R.D. De Puma.

During the fifth century, ugly frontal versions of Medusa's severed head make their first appearance on mirrors, either filling the medallion (see Rebuffat-Emmanuel 1973: 303–306, pls. 62–63; Serafin 2000: figs. 32–33, 35, 38–40), or appearing in the exergue beneath a representation of the fleeing hero (an example from the mid-fifth century now in Copenhagen shows winged Perseus holding his curved dagger and a bag weighed down with Medusa's head; Salskov Roberts 1981: no. 10). Her head was also used to decorate the wooden or ivory handles that were attached to tang mirrors (Serafin 2000: fig 31). From an early date, therefore, the Etruscans were quite familiar with the power and danger of Medusa's gaze and Perseus's role in her decapitation.

Their use of the Gorgoneion as mirror iconography most likely embodied multiple messages. Not only was it a story intricately connected to the mirror's practical function (reflection and the gaze), but the Etruscans also likely knew that Medusa was a mortal whose vanity about her beautiful hair caused her downfall and transformation into a hideous monster whose gaze became dangerous and death-causing. Moreover, her head also served as a wedding gift to King Polydectes: after the decapitation, Perseus presented it to show his fulfillment of his vow, indicating that the theme of matrimony could have been evoked by this imagery, along with the head's potential for prophecy and divination. Finally, although this is never shown on mirrors, the Etruscans would have known, from imported Greek vases, that another result of Medusa's decapitation was her motherhood: born at the moment of her death were Pegasus and her son Chrysaor, indicating that new life came from her severed head.

During the fourth century, the focus in mirror iconography shifted to Perseus as Gorgon killer, with examples showing him approaching a sleeping, winged, half naked and non-monstrous Medusa (de Grummond 2006: fig. V.3), or in a triad observing a reflection of her severed head in a pool of water or as it lies on the ground (Swaddling 2001: no. 27). The latter scenes suggest that her head, like that of Orpheus who met an equally violent end, not only retained its powers after her death but also that it functioned as the mouthpiece for prophecies (de Grummond 2000c; for Orpheus, see De Puma 2001), especially since Perseus adopts the stance of the *haruspex* in one of these scenes (de Grummond 2006: fig. II.14).

The iconography of the Boston mirror deviates significantly from these more conventional representations. Its Medusa is no monster but a beautiful young woman with an elaborate hairstyle (Ovid (4.793–800) mentions that she was originally famous not only for her beauty but also her glorious hair); there are also no snakes in sight. In many ways, the Boston Medusa resembles the beautiful mortal she once was, before she encountered the wrath of Athena. The engraver emphasizes her lean, fit, girlish body, and nothing in her outward appearance, at least, suggests that she could be dangerous to human eyes. In addition, there is no hint of the supernatural (e.g., wings) in her appearance: in fact, this Medusa's only "costume" is her nudity. Moreover, rather than being asleep and unaware of what is about to transpire, her actions emphasize her unwillingness to die without a fight. Nevertheless, despite her resistance, it is also clear that it is in vain: Medusa's transition begins before the viewers' eyes but not, once again, through the depiction of any bloodshed: instead, it is conveyed by her body language, especially her limp right arm and hand, and her collapsing legs.

Full nudity was a trait used in Etruscan art to signify a variety of concepts, from divinity, eroticism, and fertility to danger and vulnerability. According to Larissa Bonfante, "the extraordinary power of the shock effect of nakedness

[could also mark] the rites of passage from one state to another – life to death, childhood to war for men or marriage for women – and works powerful magic” (2000: 288). What, then, was the message of this unusual *interpretatio etrusca* of Medusa’s decapitation? Was the engraver just trying to show the dramatic prelude to her prophetic role in Etruria? Or, given that beauty and adornment were integral parts of her story, was it meant to serve as a cautionary tale warning against excessive vanity, while, at the same time, exalting Perseus who exhibits the qualities of a true hero (e.g., bravery and fearlessness in the face of death)? Or perhaps its message was more symbolic, given Medusa’s nudity and visualization as a girl who struggles against her fate, since these details not only evoke the concepts of virgin sacrifice and danger, but also ideas associated with liminality and rites of passage (see further, Sandhoff 2011: 82). There were many dangers and threats that could crop up during life that had to be overcome by courage, wisdom, or the support of the gods.

Given the available evidence, it is impossible to pinpoint a specific meaning or message to this unusual rendering of Perseus’s encounter with Medusa, but what it does show, like the other mirrors discussed above, is that happy endings were not a prerequisite for the iconography selected for display on these artifacts, especially during the fourth century, the heyday of the production of violent imagery in Etruria. Instead, all of these scenes indicate that mythical tragedies and stories about the darker sides of human nature and behavior played an important role as visual communication in the domestic sphere, even on luxury artifacts such as mirrors. Even if their meanings are obscure to us today, these scenes must have disseminated important cultural messages and beliefs to their prosperous and well-educated owners, ones that transcend simplistic views about peculiar or unusual tastes for cruel and bloody imagery (recall that there is a distinct absence of gore in most of the scenes). Moreover, in all cases, the victims of the violence are still alive, their fate suspended for all eternity, on the threshold between life and death. By evoking the concept of liminality, a concept so akin to the mirror’s actual function as a transformative device, their iconography could also reflect Etruscan beliefs about the power of the mirror to negotiate (both literally and symbolically) between the worlds of the living and the dead (de Grummond 2009). In all of these ways, therefore, this particular category of decorated mirrors provided elite Etruscans of all ages with a range of provocative images and complex ideas to ponder as they groomed themselves on a daily basis within their homes. As Stan Lowenstam states, “Musings about marriage, fidelity, childbirth, reputation, and death shine forth from the mirrors in which Etruscan women [and men] viewed themselves. Achillean and Odyssean myth also served as a means to publicize ideology, justify power, and identify enemies. ... the Etruscans [used these stories]...to express their aspirations, anxieties and observations on life” (2008: 173).

4. Violence and Gender in Etruria

Brian Rose (2013: 96) has recently proposed that a Graeco-Persian sarcophagus from Didymon Teikhos, which contains a particularly graphic representation of the Sacrifice of Polyxena and the remains of a 40-year old male, was originally designed for a woman since, in addition to its dramatic sacrifice scene, the three other sides focus on female celebrations. In Etruria, numerous works of art also confirm that the depiction of violence was neither a “male” theme, nor was there any attempt to equate only men with brutal or bloody imagery. As noted above, not only did both sexes use engraved mirrors with violent iconographies but they also performed rituals in sanctuaries where temples graphically depicted the dire consequences of hubristic behavior (e.g., at Pyrgi (see [Figure 26.2](#)) and in Orvieto, where a temple in the Cannicella necropolis was enhanced with a representation of Orestes’s matricide: see Stopponi 2011). Moreover, within the funerary sphere, men and women were interred in containers decorated with scenes of battles, human sacrifice and murder. The Tarquinian aristocrat, Ramtha Huznai, for example, who died some time during the fourth century, was interred in a stone sarcophagus enhanced with painted friezes depicting Amazons battling Greek warriors and reliefs on the ends of the lid showing the death of Aktaion (van der Meer 2004: 35–36 and figs. 12–13; Warden 2009: 202–203, and fig. 13.2). Velthur Partunus, a *zilch cecheneri* (or high-ranking magistrate) who died at the age of 82, also reclines eternally on the lid of a limestone sarcophagus carved with an Amazonomachy and a Centauromachy (Haynes 2000: fig. 237). Similarly, the Vulcian couple, Larth Tetnies and his wife Thanchvil Tarnai, embrace on the lid of a box carved with an Amazonomachy and other battle scenes (van der Meer 2004: 37; Rowland 2008).

During the Hellenistic period, numerous individuals from Chiusi, Perugia and Volterra also had their ashes placed inside stone and terracotta containers decorated with a wide range of violent imagery. Urns now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, for example, depict Thana Vipinei Ranazunia reclining serenely as a raging battle takes place on the front of her urn (De Puma 2013a: 247–248 and fig. 6.93) or other women resting above scenes depicting the Amazonomachy and the murder of a woman in her bed (De Puma 2013a: 245–246, fig. 6.92 and 249, fig. 6.95, respectively). Although Amazonomachies do not have a clear funerary significance, it is unlikely that they carried the same messages as when used in Greek art (i.e., as evocations of battle between civilization and the barbaric eastern regions). The Etruscan works emphasize both Amazon victories and defeats, suggesting to some scholars that this theme was not “related to the sex of the deceased, but rather ... dictated by the respect roused by the deeds of these fearless mythical

[strong and martial] women” (van der Meer 2004: 38).

In his catalogue entry on a Volterranean travertine cinerary urn now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, De Puma (2013a: 249) asks, “Why would one select any murder of a woman, let alone a matricide, for the subject of what appears to be the cinerary urn of a woman?” But as Warden has pointed out in his analysis of Ramtha Huzcnai’s sarcophagus, even if we cannot reconstruct what these subjects might have signified to their Etruscan patrons and viewers, many deal with themes of transformation and blood-shedding which would have been of interest to all Etruscans, regardless of gender, in the funerary sphere: “Death is by its nature a transformative experience and was to the Etruscans a rite of passage; transformation was attainable through ritual. ... By controlling the transformative process itself, by harnessing the blood of beasts and the power of primal animal forces, the Etruscan elite may have attempted to enshrine permanently its status at the pinnacle of this social landscape” (Warden 2009: 214).

Based on what has survived not only in the funerary sphere but also in religious and domestic contexts, it is, therefore, clear that themes of violence in Etruscan art cannot be viewed either as a male prerogative or even as “masculine” themes.⁸ And there is no evidence to suggest that artists modified their iconography so as to appeal to the gender of their clients (contra: van der Meer 1995: 26). Dark stories in Etruria were for everyone, since they effectively brought to the fore, in a vivid and dramatic way, the many different types of problems and tensions that could arise in families, between couples, or when mortals challenged the gods.

5. Conclusions

This chapter highlights the different uses of violent imagery in Etruria in contexts as varied as the sanctuary, the tomb, and the home. These representations indicate that specific Greek stories were exploited deliberately not because the Etruscans had a taste for violence and its depiction. Instead, they appear because they resonated both emotionally and psychologically with Etruscans of all ages and effectively communicated specific beliefs, values, and anxieties about human behavior and passions (Lowenstam 2008: 152). Within the sanctuary, there was no better way to articulate the power and authority of the gods than by showing, in a vivid and dramatic manner, the dire punishments meted out to hubristic mortals. In the funerary sphere, the motif of violent death dominated in order to satisfy the religious and ritual needs of the deceased and his/her family rather than to fulfill a taste for blood and gore. Likewise, within the home, certain stories with violent subject matter selected from the Hellenic repertoire expressed ideas that were of concern to the Etruscans in their daily lives, from celebrations of heroes and

characters whose behavior could be emulated to those who had transgressed or subverted cultural norms and expectations, thereby threatening the survival of their families and lineage. Moreover, because these images are in the minority in terms of the overall corpus of subjects found on religious and domestic artifacts, their presence must be the result of a thoughtful and deliberate selection. No longer can any of the violent representations in Etruscan art be considered symptomatic of a peculiar appetite for bloody or horrific imagery and a taste for gore and brutality.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

To date, there is no comprehensive study about the use and function of violent imagery in Etruscan art, making the 2015 study by Cerchiai, Lubtchansky, and Pouzadoux an other important resource for scholars. More has been written about violence in the funerary sphere than in any other context: important resources here include Steuernagel 1998, de Angelis 1999, van der Meer 2004, Bonfante and Swaddling 2006, de Grummond 2006, Steingraber 2006, Warden 2009, and de Angelis 2014. Haynes 2000, Jannot 2005, and Stopponi 2011 provide a good background to the use of violent narratives in the religious sphere. Other scholars such as Bonfante 1984, Spivey 1992, Lowenstam 2008, Hedreen 2012, Scheffer 2006, Carpino 2009, 2011, and De Puma 2013a have focused on a particular theme (e.g., human sacrifice, Ajax’s suicide, the murder of Troilos, the cannibalism of Tydeus, the matricide of Orestes) and its appearance on a range of artifacts from both Etruria and Greece.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise noted.
- 2 New discoveries from the Greek world as well as reassessments of iconic images such as that on the Athenian Parthenon add further support to the idea that the Etruscans’ presumably peculiar “taste” for violence is the result of oft-repeated but inaccurate analyses of their material culture. In both a seminal 1996 article, as well as her new book, *The Parthenon Enigma* (2014), Joan Connelly argues for a mythological interpretation of the Parthenon frieze that focuses on the theme of virgin (e.g., human) sacrifice, while Richard Neer includes a discussion of a Graeco-Persian sarcophagus recovered in the mid-1990s from northwestern Anatolia in his comprehensive 2012 survey of Greek art and archeology. Given that the latter contains a graphic rendering of the Sacrifice of Polyxena (see further Rose 2013), Neer writes, “What appears to [modern viewers] as an image of unmatched brutality might, to Greek eyes, have seemed more like a case of extreme piety” (2012: 211).
- 3 As Small (2008: 44) has also pointed out, there were many Greek stories

that do not appear in Etruria (e.g., the birth of Erichthonios) while others have only survived there (e.g., Pasiphae holding a youthful Minotaur on her lap).

- 4 Thuillier (2013: 839) rightly points out that “the bloody violence of fist fights or chariot crashes, possibly fatal to the driver, are not the sole preserve of Etruria: these motifs also exist in Greece (and Rome).” For more on the violence and bloody nature of Greek sports, see Kyle 2014.
- 5 Less than 10 percent of all known mirrors – a corpus that includes between 3000 and 4000 artifacts – contains one of these themes, indicating that they represent unusual and special subjects; nevertheless, because certain themes appear on more than one mirror, it is clear that some dark stories had a strong emotional resonance with consumers.
- 6 Signs of repair and burial in contexts long after manufacture indicate that these objects were indeed used during life.
- 7 For the matricide mirrors, see Carpino 2011; Spivey 1992 discusses the Suicide of Ajax while Scheffer 2006 and Carpino 2009 focus on the cannibalism of Tydeus; Carpino 2009 also analyzes the images of fighting warriors from the perspective of their historical and cultural contexts. See also Lowenstam 2008 and Hedreen 2012 for the murder of Troilos.
- 8 For a similar case with respect to Roman homes, see Cutler 2006 and Newby 2012. For more on Romans and mirrors, see Hales 2008 and Taylor 2008.

PART V

The Etruscan Legacy and Contemporary Issues

CHAPTER 28

Annius of Viterbo and the Beginning of Etruscan Studies

Ingrid D. Rowland

Today, the Italian city of Viterbo is a provincial capital served by strictly local rail lines and a set of regional highways; the country's main railroad line and the autostrada have passed it by. For medieval pilgrims and early modern travelers, however, Viterbo was the last important stop on the main road leading south to Rome from the rest of Europe, the Via Francigena, and, for several decades in the twelfth century, it, rather than Rome, served as the official papal residence. Viterbo's reputation, therefore, was truly international.

Where real people traveled, so did the heroes of legend. As one striking example, the fourteenth-century English version of the King Arthur saga known as the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Benson and Forster 1994) tells how the monarch and his Knights of the Round Table threw a rousing, wine-soaked party in the Valley of Viterbo, or, as the poet calls it, the Vale of Vertennon. The poet clearly assumes that readers will recognize these names and places when Arthur and the knights turn southward after a string of conquests in Tuscany:

Toward Viterbo this valiant aveeres the reines ...
In the Vertenonne vale the vines i-monges;
There sujournes this sovereign with solace in herte,
To ... Revel with rich wine, riotes himselven,
This roy with his real men of the Round Table,
With mirthes and melody and manykin gamnes;
Was never merrier men made on this erthe! (lines 3169–75)

According to the poet, Arthur and his merry men partook “of Vernage and other wine and venison baken,” a bill of fare that sounds accurate enough to be drawn from real experience. In Dante's *Purgatorio* (24.24), Pope Martin IV, among the gluttons, “shits eels of Bolsena and Vernaccia,” making it clear that Vernaccia vines were planted in this region in the thirteenth century and highly regarded (their replacement by Trebbiano and Malvasia varieties dates to the twentieth century). Venison would also have been plentiful in the thick woods that still cover the slopes of Monte Cimino, the extinct volcano that looms over the city. No wonder the delights of Viterbo

could make the lords of the Round Table forget all about the Holy Grail. King Arthur was only one amid a legion of legendary visitors to Viterbo, from fully mythical figures such as Hercules to legendary mortals like Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus, the fourth-century Roman consul described by Livy as the first Roman to traverse the dense, menacing Ciminian Wood, as he did in 310 BCE in order to fight the Etruscans of Sutri (Livy 7.36). According to some modern scholars, Arthur himself has an Etruscan connection: they argue that his Latin name, Artorius, is itself of Etruscan origin, a derivative of the common Etruscan name Arnth (Green 2009: 3–46; Schulze 1904: 72, 333–338). Arthur, if he existed, would have been a fifth-century (CE) Romano-British chieftain engaged in fighting off Scandinavian invaders after the withdrawal of the Imperial Roman garrisons from Britannia (Green 2009).

Viterbo, of course, was intimately connected with the Etruscan past, especially in the minds of its residents, many of them direct descendants of those same Etruscans, though it is worth noting that in the Middle Ages the city also hosted a considerable English community with its own church, San Tommaso di Canterbury (Ciarrocchi 1992). Despite all the changes that have transformed Viterbo in the modern period, the city's Etruscan heritage is clearly visible today. Although centuries of leveling and filling have smoothed out the terrain, the surviving volcanic cliffs on which Viterbo's various neighborhoods perch reveal dozens of Etruscan tombs, many still used as storerooms for farm implements, and the decorative motifs carved in the local volcanic tufa repeat themes like lions and rosettes that go back to remote antiquity. Local cults also continued ancient traditions in a Christian vein, celebrated in works of art and architecture that themselves reflected the particularities of the city's ancient heritage: fantastic creatures stalk the roofline of the ninth-century church of San Silvestro (Figure 28.1) in the same way that acroteria and ridgepole sculptures once decorated Etruscan temples; a head of Jupiter appears over the eleventh-century portal of the church of Santa Maria Nova (Figure 28.2) in the same position as the sculpted heads on Etruscan gates (notably the Porta dell' Arco at Volterra); the tomb of Pope John XXI in the cathedral mimics an Etruscan tomb monument; and on the night of Pentecost 1320, the Madonna stopped a demonic thunderstorm with all the expertise of the first century BCE Etruscan *fulgurator* Lars Cafates (the one who further specified his competence in Etruscan on a bilingual inscription from Pesaro as *trvtnvt.frontac*) (Turfa 2012: 48–49). This thunder-stopping Madonna, Our Lady the Liberator, performed her miracle just uphill from a convent church called Santa Maria in Volturna, the same name that appears in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* as “Vertennonne,” the valley that split Viterbo in two until the mid-twentieth century, and which is probably itself an Etruscan name (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002: 99; Latte 1960: 37 n. 5).



Figure 28.1 Sculpted animals on the church of San Silvestro (now Il Gesù), ninth century CE. From Viterbo.

Photo: I. Rowland.



Figure 28.2 Ancient head of Jupiter on the medieval church of Santa Maria Nova. From Viterbo.

Photo: I. Rowland.

Yet, despite this powerful physical and cultural legacy, the city of Viterbo never appeared in ancient texts, nor had it produced a famous Etruscan hero. Little Chiusi had Lars Porsenna, Corneto had its Tarquins, Rome had its Etruscan kings, but Fabius Maximus Rullianus plunged into the Ciminian Wood in search of Etruscans from the small settlement of Sutri, not the large settlement of Viterbo. Moreover, the earliest documents with the name

Viterbium or Biterbium only went back to the time of Charlemagne, not of Lars Porsenna (Valtieri 1977: 32–40).

Into this yawning gap, in the late fifteenth century, stepped a Dominican friar named Giovanni Nanni (1437–1502), a native son of Viterbo whose investigations of ancient Etruria became a mixture of insightful analysis and brilliant fiction, both literary and archaeological. For a few decades in the sixteenth century, his antiquarian studies, which he published in Latin as Iohannes Annii, captivated a wide circle of European readers, inspiring painters, architects, scholars and forgers in Spain, France, Belgium, Bavaria, and Sweden as well as the Italian peninsula. Most of all, however, the man usually known as Annii of Viterbo inspired the people of Viterbo itself, in ways that still color modern life, in a city he peopled with legendary Etruscan heroes and instilled with a sense of patriotic pride that has lasted for another five centuries.

Though he is famous now as a forger, Giovanni Nanni, the man who became Iohannes Annii of Viterbo, was also an ingenious scholar in several fields, as well as an insightful observer of his surroundings and his fellow humanity. He was also far closer than we can ever be to his native terrain, in a direct physical sense as well as a sense of emotional, intellectual, or spiritual connection. Today's Viterbo is a city whose primeval contours have been blurred by five additional centuries of progressive leveling of its volcanic hills and the filling of its vales and gullies. Many of the ancient and medieval monuments that were visible in the fifteenth century have deteriorated, or suffered more violent destruction: bombed by Allied aircraft in the Second World War, paved over, or buried under new construction. As a boy, a youth, and then again as an elderly man, therefore, Giovanni Nanni saw a much more rugged, agricultural Viterbo than the commercial city we see today, a city still governed in many respects by the ancient Etruscan rhythms of life.

However much we think we know about the Etruscans, moreover, Friar Giovanni was closer to them by half a millennium. Like his contemporaries, he had a less finely tuned sense than a modern scholar of the relative ages of things, built, painted, sculpted, and written: many medieval buildings, the ones we would call Romanesque, looked genuinely ancient not only to him, but also to fifteenth-century Italian eyes in general, and so did ninth-century Carolingian manuscripts. Yet these fifteenth-century viewers also understood something essential about antiquity and the Middle Ages: where we see (and seek out) the differences that distinguish particular periods, they saw the essential elements of continuity that create a tradition.

From the outset, therefore, the work of this forger and scholar from Viterbo combined an international reach with an intensely local focus; in this double quality, it achieved many of the same goals as the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, which revived the most ancient English poetic form, alliterative verse, and rooted Arthur firmly in his traditional haunts of southwest Britain – while also

sending him off to visit the Pope in Rome, drink Vernaccia in Viterbo, and fend off crack troops from Damascus. Early modern antiquarians almost always thought in this double way, on minute and macroscopic scale, whether they lived in Britain, Italy, or the places in between, because it was the way they lived their lives. Annius of Viterbo may have attributed his scholarly career to the fact that he was born in a particular neighborhood in Viterbo, but that career took him away from his native city to Genoa, Florence, Mantua, and Rome, where he met people and read books from places still more exotic: Armenia, Iberia, the world of Judaism, the ancient past. He cast his Etruscans in the same mold: cosmopolitan, yet uniquely local, with a profound sense of their own history. And he gave them names: names of people, but also names of places.

The story of the man who became Annius of Viterbo, like his own Etruscan stories, began, therefore, with his home. He describes his birthplace so precisely in one of his works that we can locate his neighborhood if not his house, and he is especially proud that he shares this origin with his cousin Tommaso Nanni, who also rose to positions of great responsibility within the Dominican order (Nanni 1515: clxiv verso):

The Metallii are the people who live on the hill of Saint Simeon and Saint Nicholas up to Sipale [Fontana Grande] ... This hill gave me birth in the year of our salvation 1437 on Epiphany eve [January 5]. Just ten months earlier, my cousin was born on the same hill on the same Metallio hill in the Vetulonia district, in a house adjoining the area of Spurinella [now Via della Marrocca], certainly the Metallio Hill shines for its learning.

A notarial document in the state archive of Viterbo confirms the birth date, if not the tendency for the area of Metallio to produce scholars (Fumagalli 1980: 195). Other records of his youth and early years are scarce. Both Tommaso and Giovanni joined the Dominican convent of Santa Maria in Gradi around 1448, but whereas Tommaso went on to study at Padua, Giovanni continued his studies at Santa Maria Novella in Florence. In July of 1466 they were together again: both cousins petitioned Pope Paul II to receive their master's degrees in theology at the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome (Tavuzzi 2007: 34–35, 83, 251 (Tommaso); 104, 145, 148 (Giovanni)). Here, as Riccardo Fubini suggests, the Nanni cousins must have come into contact with the antiquarians at the University of Rome, such as Pomponio Leto, the virtual inventor of archaeology, and Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli, professor of grammar, editor of the first printed edition of Vitruvius, and director of the first modern staging of an ancient play, Seneca's *Phaedra* (Fubini 2012). The Dominican convent of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva and the university's Palazzo della Sapienza were only a few dozen meters distant from one another, both close neighbors of the Pantheon. Another humanist residing in Rome, Gaspare da Verona, certainly met Giovanni Nanni, of whom he wrote: "I understood him to be a philosopher, and an elegant

physicist at that, sharp, bold, and quick” (Fumagalli 1980: 198). And, in fact, the first work we know from Giovanni Nanni’s hand is a vernacular alchemical treatise, *On Alchemy, or the Art of the Stone* (Fubini 2012; Nanni n.d. *Opera*).

After receiving their master’s degrees, the Nanni cousins returned to Viterbo and Santa Maria in Gradi, where both taught theology and preached. Thanks to the papal legate in Viterbo, Niccolo Forteguerra, to whom he dedicated an astrological treatise entitled *On the Turkish Empire according to the Astronomers*, Giovanni moved to Genoa in 1471, where Forteguerra held the position of Commendatory Abbot of the convent of Santo Stefano (Fubini 2012). Here he taught grammar as an employee of the city from 1471 to 1476, and preached from the pulpit of the local Dominican convent, San Domenico. His astrological predictions about the Turks did not quite come true, but then most astronomers had trouble predicting the future successfully. His inability to predict the course of history accurately, however, did not hamper his career. Indeed, Nanni had a knack for finding patronage, and his success in Genoa was guaranteed by his ability to forge a friendship with Archbishop Paolo Fregoso. He was appointed prior of the convent of San Domenico in 1474.

In this advantageous position, Nanni drew up two horoscopes and a magical work, *On the Sculpture of Gems and Rings* (now lost) for the Milanese warlord Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the de facto ruler of Genoa. But when the city rebelled against Milan in 1478, both Nanni and his patron, Archbishop Fregoso, took the side of the locals against the Milanese outsider. This was when Giovanni Nanni reworked his tract *On the Turkish Empire* as a new visionary treatise called *On the Future Triumphs of the Christians*. First printed in 1480 and designed to flatter Pope Sixtus IV, the book enjoyed international success and went into multiple editions. Giovanni’s reputation flourished as well, although once again the course of events did not quite bear out the author’s astrological and prophetic predictions: the so-called Muslim Antichrist, the Sultan, continued to grow and thrive in spite of all the dire predictions leveled by Friar Giovanni from his reading of the stars (Fubini 2012).

An excruciating earache changed the course of Nanni’s life in November of 1488. The infection spread to become an abscess of the brain. Nanni recognized that his prospects for survival were slim enough to require a miracle, and so he prayed for that miracle to the Virgin Mary, but he did so by a special title: Virgin Immaculate, the name that proclaimed that she, like her son, had been born without sin. For a Dominican, the prayer was a truly desperate measure, because the order had officially rejected the doctrine of Immaculate Conception. But the miraculous healing took place in spite of doctrine: the abscess burst through Friar Giovanni’s eardrum and on Christmas Eve of 1488 he made a solemn act of devotion in church,

dedicating himself in eternity to the Virgin Immaculate (Fumagalli 1980: 189–191). On one of the era's most heated debates, this fervent upholder of Dominican doctrine had gone definitively over to the side of the Franciscans.

Giovanni Nanni was a particularly well-known cleric in Genoa, which meant that the local Dominican hierarchy responded swiftly to his change of heart. His superiors questioned him about his conversion (in other words, subjected him to an inquisition), he stood his ground, and by spring of 1489, he was back in Viterbo, his books and papers all confiscated in Genoa. Friar Giovanni Nanni had been sent, like many a troublesome professor before and since, into early retirement. But his sudden exile from Genoa was also a homecoming, to his old convent of Santa Maria in Gradi, and to his cousin Tommaso, who had returned to Viterbo in 1482 as Vicar General of the Observant Dominicans for the Province of Rome. His home, and its ancient past, now became his source of inspiration and the focus of his ever-energetic interest.

Santa Maria in Gradi, with its Gothic halls, well-stocked library, and archive, provided the platform from which Nanni launched his career as an antiquarian, the career that would bring him international fame under a new name, Iohannes Annius of Viterbo. Yet despite his disagreements with his superiors in Genoa, Nanni's first career, as an expert Dominican theologian, was by no means over. Shortly after arriving at Santa Maria in Gradi in 1489, he supplied an opinion on the church-sponsored moneylending operations known as Monti di Pietà for Pope Innocent VIII, noting in his preface to the work that lack of access to his old books and papers meant that he would be giving the matter fresher, more thoughtful consideration (Rozelli n.d., Nanni "Questiones duo": 2 recto).

In this same preface, Nanni also informs Pope Innocent that his time has been taken up by another job: on paper, the city council of Viterbo had engaged him to teach grammar, but the clever Dominican turned that course into one on local history. Nanni had also begun to cultivate a local private patron: Odoardo Farnese, whose clan of feudal barons owned huge lots of property around Viterbo and a palazzo in the center of town. Aristocrats were often slow to pay their protégés, but so was the city council of Viterbo: Friar Giovanni was wise to broadcast his expertise as widely as possible. As a Dominican, he did not need money to live, but he would certainly need money to print any books he intended to write.

In his new venue, Giovanni Nanni turned from writing about the prophetic future and the mysteries of alchemy and philosopher's stones to writing and teaching about the mysteries of the past. He began with the history of Viterbo, but his antiquarian studies would eventually involve most of the ancient Mediterranean world. The first indication we have of this shift in interests is a fragmentary *History of Viterbo*, presumably composed shortly after Friar Giovanni's return home; only the last chapter survives, presented as a summary of the previous six. It is not clear, however, that those other six

chapters ever existed – this final summary may also have been the author’s initial sketch (Baffioni 1981).

In this *Summary of the History of Viterbo*, Friar Giovanni, still writing as Giovanni Nanni, begins to outline the ideas that will drive his future researches as a scholar of antiquity. During his student days in Rome in the 1460s, Greek historians had become the latest fashion, thanks to the influx of Greek manuscripts and Greek scholars after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. Names like Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Diodorus Siculus joined Livy, Tacitus, Caesar, and Sallust on scholarly bibliographies, inspiring translators to make these texts available in Latin as well as Greek. The massive *Library of History* of Diodorus Siculus, for example, was composed sometime between 60 and 30 BCE, perhaps in Alexandria; he was, therefore, a contemporary of Vitruvius, Vergil, Caesar, Cleopatra, and Augustus. The last complete text must have been destroyed in the sack of Constantinople in 1453; what came to Rome in the ensuing years were complete texts of Books 1–5 and 11–20. Italian scholars were particularly interested in Chapters 24–40 of Book 5, “On Gaul, Celtiberia, Iberia, Liguria, and Tyrrhenia, and on the inhabitants of these countries and the customs they observe.” Yet for all Diodorus had to say about the Tyrrhenians in general, he had nothing at all to say about Viterbo. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote his *Roman Antiquities* at virtually the same time as Diodorus, with extensive information about Etruria in his early chapters, but again, Viterbo never appeared. Giovanni Nanni had no other option than to wring history from other sources, beginning with the physical form of his native city and his own common sense.

Viterbo’s first circuit of city walls dates from 1210; before that, the city consisted of separate settlements on steep rocky outcrops, each divided from the others by streams and connected by a series of bridges. The largest of these streams, the Urcionio or Arcione, was covered over in the mid-twentieth century, its steep-walled bed filled with rubble from the Allied bombings of 1943, but other districts still occupy their own separate rocky plateaus, including the spur of rock with the cathedral and Pontifical Palace and the district known as Piano Scarano, both still linked to the rest of Viterbo by bridges that rest on Etruscan foundations (Valtieri 1977: 31–37). According to tradition, the Cathedral itself stood on the ruins of a temple to Hercle (but that tradition itself may stem from Giovanni Nanni). It was evident to Friar Giovanni that Etruscan Viterbo must have existed, because the ruins were there for all to see. He concluded, logically, that it must have been known by another name (Valtieri 1977: 34). In that case there were a plethora of local toponyms to choose from, some strange and suggestive of great antiquity, like Volturno, which sounded so much like the ancient Etruscan gods Vertumnus, the shape-shifter, and Voltumna, worshipped at the pan-Etruscan shrine called the *Fanum Voltumnæ* – the “Vertennon” of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Volturna seemed to denote the valley of the Urcionio – another odd-sounding

name. The valley's other name, Faul, was equally mysterious and unusual. Viterbo also had plainly descriptive names, like Valle Piatta, the "flat valley" where Pope Sixtus IV built a new palazzo for the papal government in the 1470's, the very years that Giovanni Nanni was starting his career in Genoa. There was Sonsa, the high plateau with the fort that guarded Viterbo to the north. The challenge that Nanni set for himself was to cobble all these names and places together and make a convincing story.

He started with the idea that Etruscan Viterbo, like its medieval successor, must have grown from the union of separate settlements. In 1210, that union came about by the efforts of a merchant commune, but for remote antiquity ancient authors, and hence fifteenth-century scholars, seemed to prefer referring such ambitious projects to a single heroic founder. As Viterbo's heroic founder, Friar Giovanni's *Summary* proposed the Egyptian god Osiris. As for the city's ancient name, he suggested Volturna – the Vertennon of Arthurian fame.

In 1491, shortly after composing (or at least summarizing) this *History of Viterbo*, laced with compliments to the local baronial family, the Farnese, as well as to Pope Innocent VIII, Nanni dedicated a brief epigraphic work to Ranuccio Farnese, *On the Famous Men and Deeds of Viterbo*, which explicitly traced the family's descent from Osiris the wall-builder (Weiss 1962). Next, writing as Iohannes Nanis Guerisci (Giovanni di Guerisco Nanni suggests that his father may have been named Guerisco), he addressed an archaeological treatise to Viterbo's governing Council of Eight. This text he called *On the Marble Tablets of Volturrhena*, combining the name Volturna with Tyrrhenoi, the Greek word for the Etruscans. This pamphlet described six purportedly ancient objects with important implications for civic history. Five were inscribed tablets, three written in Etruscan, one in Greek, and one in eighth century Latin. The sixth "tablet" was actually a sculpted relief, composed of separate fragments, that he describes as having been walled into the chancel screen of Viterbo's cathedral. The Etruscan tablets had conveniently disintegrated by the time he described them in *On the Marble Tablets of Volturrhena*, absolving Nanni of the need to provide and interpret their written texts; the other two inscriptions, both carved into alabaster (not marble) roundels and still preserved, assert Viterbo's immemorial independence as a free commune (Weiss 1962; Fubini 2003: 291–331). The Latin inscription, a decree of Desiderius, King of the Lombards and dated to 776 (Figure 28.3), declares that three separate settlements – Longula, Vetulonia, and Tyrrhan Volturrhena – "called Etruria" should be encircled by a wall and called Viterbo, thus pushing back use of the name Viterbo by two centuries. The sixth, sculpted tablet he identifies as an ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic text about Isis and Osiris. The horizons he had set a year of two before in his *History of Viterbo* had expanded rapidly.

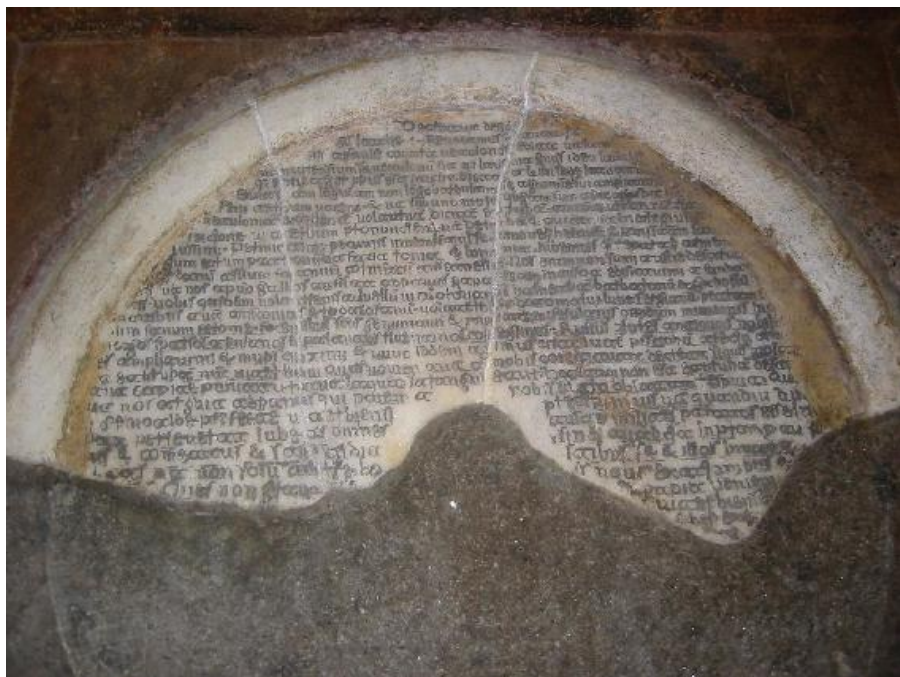


Figure 28.3 The “Desiderius Decree” forged by Annius of Viterbo. Viterbo, Museo Civico.

Photo: I. Rowland.

The two surviving inscriptions of the five “marble Volturrhenian tablets,” carved into soft alabaster rather than hard marble, are clearly forgeries (see also [Chapter 29](#)). The Greek text is barely grammatical. The Desiderius Decree is written in a script known as Beneventan, a style otherwise only known in ninth-century manuscripts, its flowing, curved forms evidently suited for pen and ink rather than the chisel, or, more likely in this case, the awl (Weiss 1962). The “Egyptian” sculpture is made up of ancient and medieval marble reliefs with a backing made from a Hebrew tombstone bearing the date 1409 (exhibited in the Museo Civico, Viterbo). Nanni could have created the entire “Egyptian” pastiche, but he might also have found at least part of it where he said he found it: walled into the chancel screen of the cathedral. We will probably never know. *On the Marble Tablets of Volturrhena* is certainly, however, the work of a person who knows that what he has created is not really what it pretends to be: that is, a forger.

With the accession of a new pope, Alexander VI Borgia, in 1492, Friar Giovanni’s connection with the Farnese family opened a new range of career possibilities when the pope took a “Beautiful Giulia” Farnese as his latest mistress, the daughter of the same Ranuccio Farnese to whom Nanni had dedicated *On the Illustrious Men and Deeds of Viterbo* (Romei and Rosini 2012). When the pontiff came to Viterbo for a hunting expedition in October

of 1493, however, the outing took an excitingly unexpected turn. In the rural zone of Monte Cipollara, “Onion Hill,” the hunters pursued a rabbit down a hole that led to an underground Etruscan tomb, still filled with carved and inscribed sarcophagi (Danielsson 1928; Cristofani 1979). These were brought with great pomp and excitement to the new city hall in Valle Piatta, where they may still be on display, for there is an impressive set of Etruscan sarcophagi in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Priori. The inscriptions that would confirm their identification as the Monte Cipollara sarcophagi have, however, long since weathered away (Emiliozzi 1986: 19–36; Curran 1999: 171–172).

Within a month of this discovery, Friar Giovanni produced a little study of the statues and their historical significance, informing the Pope that they commemorated the visit of the Egyptian goddess Isis to a place that was not called Onion Hill, Monte Cipollara, after all: it was Mons Cybellarius, hill of the great mother goddess Cybele (Danielsson 1928). This little *Borgiana lucubratio*, “Borgian study,” as the author called it, still concentrated on the illustrious history of Viterbo, where the statues and inscriptions had been found, but the friar also cast his attention farther afield, to Rome and Spain. He had already traced the pope’s lineage to ancient Egypt, identifying the bull on the Borgia coat of arms with the sacred Apis bull that was an incarnation of Osiris. The fresco decorations of the Borgia apartments in the Vatican Palace, executed by Bernardino Pinturicchio in these very years, celebrate Isis, Osiris, and the Apis bull in terms so similar to the *Borgiana Lucubratio* that Paola Mattiangeli has suggested Friar Giovanni’s influence in this pictorial scheme as well (Mattiangeli 1981).

In such glamorous company, Nanni was becoming restless in his convent. For a brief time in 1496, he even left the Dominicans altogether and took up residence with the Augustinian friars at Sant’Agostino in Viterbo. In 1499, however, Pope Alexander appointed him to the third-highest position in the Dominican order: Master of the Sacred Palace, the Vatican’s resident theologian and censor of published books (Fumagalli 1984: 363; Weiss 1962: 435–436).

In the years immediately before this promotion, between the *Borgiana lucubratio* of 1493 and 1498, when he published his last and most compendious work, Giovanni Nanni recast his ancient history yet again, deepening and expanding its range. But he also recast himself. He wrote his largest and most ambitious book as Johannes Annii Viterbiensis, no longer Nanni, which simply meant “Johnson” (or possibly Nani, “dwarf”); instead, he revealed himself as the scion of an illustrious ancient clan, the Annii, which had produced two ancient Roman emperors. “The city of Etruria,” he would write in this new volume, “was both the native region of the early kingship and of the Annii Veri, an extremely ancient Etruscan family, adorned by the august Emperors Antoninus [Pius] and Commodus” (Nanni 1515:

clxxiv recto). For the grandson of a butcher, this imperial ancestry implied a considerable change in social status. To his credit, at the same time “Annius” also made a sincere effort to learn to read Etruscan script, for the Monte Cipollara inscriptions were undoubtedly genuine and can be reconstructed with fair accuracy from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century transcriptions (Danielsson 1928; *CIE* 5740, 5741).

Friar Giovanni’s familiarity with the pope had led to meeting other Spaniards at the papal court, notably the Spanish ambassador Garcilaso de la Vega and cardinal Bernardino de Carvajal. With their help, when Johannes Annii of Viterbo looked for a patron to sponsor the printing of his newest, longest work he was able to turn, successfully, to Their Most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. *Commentaries on the Works of Various Authors who speak of Antiquities* issued from the papal press of Eucharius Silber in Rome on August 3, 1498, all three hundred-odd pages of them (Nanni 1498).

The texts collected in the *Commentaries* range from wholly invented ones written by wholly invented people (e.g., Metasthenes the Persian) to genuine works by genuine ancient authors (e.g., Propertius *Elegy* 4.2), only slightly doctored to tell a new story. A chapter on “Fifty Annian Questions” is dedicated by Johannes Annii to his cousin Thomas Annii, by then long ensconced as Prior of Santa Maria in Gradi in Viterbo; here the discussions of local history are more detailed and more specific than ever. The basic aim of the *Commentaries*, however, was to place the Etruscans, and Viterbo with them, within a scheme of universal history, beginning with the Egyptians and the Hebrew patriarchs and taking in the world from Spain to Mesopotamia.

The idea was not new; Diodorus Siculus had followed largely the same plan in his *Library of History*, and medieval chroniclers often tried to place their cities into a similarly universal historical scheme. A thirteenth-century curial official who traveled throughout Europe, Godfrey of Viterbo (who may have been German rather than Italian), had already identified the first king of the Etruscans as none other than the Hebrew patriarch Noah, also known as Italus (Godfrey of Viterbo: col. 1019). At Noah’s death, the kingship, at least according to Godfrey, passed to his son Janus, whose name Godfrey’s contemporaries would have recognized as that of the Etruscan and Roman god who governed doors, openings, crossings, and beginnings (Holland 1960). Alternatively, Peter the Deacon’s twelfth-century guidebook to Rome, the *Graphia Aureae Urbis Romae*, claimed that Noah and Janus had been the same person rather than father and son (Valentini and Zucchetti 1946: vol. 3, 77–78). Annii of Viterbo chose to agree with Peter the Deacon that Janus had been Noah himself, adding that the name of the patriarch’s kingdom on the Italian peninsula had been called Etruria and centered on Viterbo, with an extensive province called Hetruria extending for most of the Italian peninsula. Here Isis and Osiris passed through, along with a character named Egyptian

Hercules who was the first builder of Viterbo's – Etruria's – circuit wall. The three cities that make up Viterbo in the Desiderius Decree are expanded to four: Fanum Volturnae, Arbanum, Vetulonia, and Longula, whose initials make up the name of the valley that runs beneath the rocky outcrops of Viterbo: Faul. FAVL, Annii declares, is a sacred formula that stands for the Etruscans' royal city and all its illustrious history.

The purpose of this collection of forged and altered texts clearly went beyond simple patriotism. Annii not only supplied Viterbo with a pedigree; he supplied the whole ancient world from Spanish West to Babylonian East with a new set of heroes and heroic exploits, complaining repeatedly about the omissions of "lying Greece" (*Graecia mendax*) in recording this history. Riccardo Fubini has identified "lying Greece" as the ancient Greek historians, noting the fidelity with which Annii seems to follow another detractor of Greek historiographers, the Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (Fubini 2003: 3–38, 291–331). In the Borgia court, Fubini notes, Annii had come into contact with some of the Jewish refugees just expelled from Spain, including the papal physician Samuel Zarfati, whom Annii calls Samuel Talmudista (Fubini 2003: 3–38; 2012).

There are also evident parallels between the guiding scheme of the *Commentaries* and the universal historical scheme adopted by Diodorus Siculus, who said so disappointingly little about Viterbo and so much about Mesopotamia, Spain, and Gaul (Stephens 2013: 278–280). But the chief influence on this late stage of the Dominican's thought seems to be Flavius Josephus, who decried the inaccuracies of the Greek historians as he attempted to insert Biblical history into the history of the classical world. Annii set out to extend this scheme to include the Etruscans (Fubini 2003: 3–38; Stephens 2013). His most influential forgery was the set of texts he attributed to "Berosus the Chaldaean," librarian of Babylon, based on the real historical figure named Berossos who is mentioned by Vitruvius among other ancient authors. Walter Stephens describes the project concisely (Stephens 2013: 280, 281):

Annii carefully designed his literary forgeries to exploit contradictions, lacunae, and cruxes in the historical records known and respected by his contemporaries. Taken as a whole, Annii's multimedia imposture grounded a seamless revisionist narrative that began with Noah's colonization of the Mediterranean basin and proceeded through falsified Chaldaean and Egyptian king-lists until it reconnected with canonical accounts of Roman history, and ended with Desiderius, the Lombard king routed by Charlemagne in 774. At the centre of this grand historical sweep was little Viterbo.

Having observed that Josephus invoked Berossos in order to provide independent corroboration of Hebrew history, Annii applied the same

strategy to the history of Etruria. But he added an astute twist: in his day Berossos's work resembled Etruscan history in that little or nothing was known of either besides fragments preserved by Greek and Roman authors. Thus he decided to propose a rediscovered *Defloratio Berosi Chaldaica* as the primary source for resurrecting the history of the Etruscans.

The success of his falsified history was immediate; no sooner had Anniius published his *Commentaries* in Rome than a Venetian publisher extracted and printed the "ancient" documents as a separate text. But the whole story of Noah, first king of Etruria and first pope, only hung together when Anniius tied it all into a package with his carefully selected fragments and carefully woven arguments, many of them less fanciful than they might seem.

Despite his peculiar slant on antiquarian research, Anniius did act as a pioneering figure in the study of Etruria. He provided the Etruscans with a satisfyingly dense history, combining textual criticism with the analytical treatment of surviving ancient monuments and inscriptions; these enabled him to identify (often to create) heroic founders of civic institutions and prolific heads of ancient dynasties. His close examination of Viterbo's physical setting had informed him about the way cities grow, and he applied that knowledge to reconstructing the process of urbanization in antiquity. He examined Etruscan script carefully and was the first to notice that the alphabet lacked the letter "o." He understood the importance of names to human culture, both the names of places and the names of people.

The influence of the *Commentaries* was immediate and great. When Ferdinand and Isabella, through Cardinal Carvajal, commissioned a new "temple" in Rome in 1502 to celebrate the purported site of St. Peter's crucifixion on the Janiculum Hill, the architect, Donato Bramante, used a combination of Doric and Tuscan architectural forms to create an "Etruscan" style of architecture. On its altar, a sculpted relief of Noah's Ark appears beneath a relief of St. Peter crucified; above them both, Peter sits enthroned in glory, bearing the keys that identify him, at least in Annian terms, as the successor to Noah/Janus, the first person to hold the title pontifex maximus – the first, Etruscan, pope (Rowland 2006).

A fellow Viterbese, an Augustinian preacher named Egidio Antonini ("Giles of Viterbo"), began to use Annian history in his own rhetoric; when he became the preferred theologian of Pope Alexander's successor, Julius II, the continued importance of Anniius and his *Commentaries* was guaranteed. When Julius commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in 1508, the scheme began with the creation of the world and ended with the sacrifice that Noah made after landing the Ark. When Julius died in 1513, and was replaced by a Florentine, Leo X, Egidio da Viterbo declared, "Hail, Vatican, now truly the Janiculum!" for an Etruscan pope sat at last on Noah's Etruscan throne (O'Malley 1969, 1972). Antiquarians in Spain and France – Garcilaso de la Vega and Jean Lemaire de Belges, respectively – also

promoted Annian heroes (Stephens 1989; Grafton 1990), while civic sculpture in Viterbo began to display the letters FAVL. An Augustinian friar named Martin Luther began to use Annius of Viterbo to guide his own study of history.

Annius himself died in 1502; one rumor had him poisoned by Cesare Borgia. Another rumor says that he lost his mind and died in chains, the early modern equivalent of a straitjacket (Rowland 1998: 42). Within a generation or so, scholars began to subject his *Commentaries* to more critical scrutiny and found the flaws in his historical schemes and his literary style. By then, however, the Annian myths had entered so deeply into European scholarly culture that it was almost impossible to root them out entirely. Other forgers followed in his wake: Guillaume Postel in the sixteenth century, Curzio Inghirami in the seventeenth, both of whom created new Biblical and Etruscan heroes to satisfy the human craving for a stable past.

The friar's scholarly reputation has improved with closer investigation of his methods. Nanni's methods were both pioneering and extremely intelligent (Ligota 1987; Stephens 1989, 2013; Grafton 1990). In particular, his analysis of Viterbo's physical development was remarkably accurate. He turned the study of Etruria into a discipline that drew from a wide variety of skills. While Giovanni Nanni's motives, like his sources and his methods, still pose a series of enigmas, his presence in the history of Etruscan studies is still as essential as it was in the late fifteenth century.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Walter E. Stephens has written about Annius of Viterbo with wit and erudition since he was a graduate student; his most recent ideas are summarized in Stephens 2013, but Stephens 1989 and Stephens 2004 are also essential reading. Anthony Grafton 1990 points up the ways in which Annius explored pioneering scholarly methods through his forgeries. Brian Curran is another witty writer who explores how Annius used Egyptian hieroglyphs in Curran 1999. For the larger issues of forgery, see Richard De Puma’s [chapter \(29\)](#) in this volume.

CHAPTER 29

Tyrrhenian Sirens

The Seductive Song of Etruscan Forgeries

Richard Daniel De Puma

1. Introduction

Forgeries of various sorts have been with us for millennia, and show no sign of disappearing. This chapter treats specific types produced primarily, or at least most famously, during a specific period of time, 1860–1920, which were, almost certainly, the products of Italian artisans.

Etruscan art appeals to forgers because it is relatively unfamiliar when compared to Greek, Roman, or even Egyptian art. There are now, and there certainly were earlier, far fewer experts and connoisseurs concerned with Etruscan art than with the art of other ancient Mediterranean cultures. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the few scholars who were acquainted with Etruscan art worked primarily with Greek and Roman art. For them, the Etruscans were an interesting phenomenon but, due to the lack of a large corpus of original literary material, their visual and material culture remained peripheral and poorly understood. It is also true that, outside of Italy, relatively little Etruscan art was on public display or even available for study during this period. Major discoveries of well-preserved, properly excavated Etruscan materials were just coming to light, and many of them were still not restored or easily accessible.

Therefore, it was possible for forgers to create objects that, to us today, might appear ridiculously odd and unlikely, but which nevertheless fooled the experts of earlier times. By the nineteenth century archaeologists were already beginning to appreciate the highly diversified and eclectic nature of Etruscan art. These qualities, of course, made it much easier for forgers to deceive vulnerable collectors and museum curators. Furthermore, forgers could exploit the natural resources (e.g., local clays and stones like alabaster or tufa) used by the Etruscans. Finally, there was a steady supply of original but damaged or incomplete Etruscan artifacts being recovered. With some ingenuity, these authentic works could be enhanced or “restored” into appealing – but phony – pastiches.

The earliest well-documented forger of Etruscan antiquities is a Dominican

priest named Giovanni Nanni, better known as Annius of Viterbo (1432 or 1437–1502). Annius was an ambitious scholar, well-versed in Latin, who examined several authentic works of Etruscan art accidentally discovered in late fifteenth-century Italy. These objects were often terracotta or stone cinerary urns and, as is usually the case, they were inscribed or painted with the name of the deceased. After collecting and studying these urns, Annius eventually claimed that he could decipher the Etruscan language. He demonstrated his skill by creating several lengthy inscriptions that combined authentic Etruscan letters and words with Greek letters and fanciful Egyptian “hieroglyphs.” He buried these new inscriptions, along with some fake sculptures, and in 1492 “excavated” them before an astonished audience that included Pope Alexander VI. Everyone was impressed when Annius began a seemingly impromptu translation of these obscure, fragmentary inscriptions. Before long, Annius had developed an elaborate theory that showed, according to his careful decipherment of several wholly-invented lengthy inscriptions and documents, that Viterbo had been the capital of a primordial Italy and that Noah, not Saint Peter, had been the first pope and ruled over the Etruscans!

Although some astute scholars doubted Annius’s claims, his fanciful history was accepted by many authorities at the time. Annius’s true deception was not discovered until many years after his death. The priest’s forgeries were made not for financial gain but to increase his reputation and position at the papal court. He also became a popular lecturer. On a more positive note, Annius’s interest in recording authentic Etruscan inscriptions encouraged other scholars to collect, carefully record, and attempt to decipher them accurately. In this sense, he can be said to have laid the methodological foundations for the modern study of the Etruscan language (Ligota 1987; Stephens 2004; see also [Chapters 14](#) and [28](#)).

2. Enhanced Etruscan Bronzes

During the nineteenth century hundreds of Etruscan bronzes were discovered, some accidentally and others through excavations, throughout Tuscany, Latium, and other parts of Italy where the Etruscans had either resided or traded. An important Latian site being explored and exploited at the time was Palestrina, ancient Praeneste. Although the ancient inhabitants of this city spoke an early form of Latin, they were strongly influenced by Etruscan culture and produced works of art that are usually classified by modern scholars as Etruscan. One of their most interesting products was a toiletries container, called a *cista* by archaeologists. Praenestine bronze *cistae* are usually made of an engraved cylindrical or ovoid container with a fitted, slightly domed lid. The container is supported, most often, by solid-cast

bronze feet, while the lid can be enhanced with a solid-cast figural handle. Approximately 90 examples of these containers have survived (Bordenache Battaglia 1979; 1990).

What makes Praenestine *cistae* attractive to forgers is that some originally contained no engraved decorations. Why not enhance the appeal and value of such an object by supplying new engravings? Thus, the object itself is an authentic original, but the engravings on its body and/or lid may be modern forgeries. A number of such enhanced *cistae* were purchased by unsuspecting collectors and museums, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. One Italian, Francesco Martinetti (1833–95), is especially known for his deceptions in this area.¹ Martinetti combined all the qualities that make a successful forger of engraved bronzes. He had trained as a jeweler and engraver, was an expert restorer, and worked as an archaeologist and antiquities dealer – a combination that was not considered inappropriate in that more innocent time. He had ready access to the ancient cemeteries of Palestrina and often carried out “excavations” there. His skills as a restorer meant that he was free to remove objects that he had discovered to his studio in Rome where, we suspect, he sometimes enhanced fragmentary or undecorated bronzes with new engravings. We should also note that Martinetti was well-known as a respected antiquities dealer and many of the major scholars, connoisseurs, and collectors of Rome were his clients.

Obviously, it is impossible to know the details of a secretive forger more than a century after his death, but we strongly suspect that Martinetti was behind a number of enhanced bronzes sold to various important collectors. These include the so-called Cista Pasinati (Figure 29.1), named for the collector and dealer who first acquired it from Martinetti; the cista is now in the British Museum. Sometime before 1864, Martinetti probably discovered a fragmentary ovoid cista at Palestrina. Although the body of this artifact was engraved, it was truncated so that the upper portion of a conventional battle scene forming the main decorative frieze was missing. It is likely that this portion was already damaged in antiquity. In any case, the object’s lid was not engraved but had a standard type of statuette for its handle. In 1864, Heinrich von Brunn (1822–94), second secretary of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, delivered a much-anticipated lecture on the early history of the city. The date set for his lecture was appropriate: April 21, the traditional birthday of Rome’s founding. What a perfect time to introduce to the scholarly world a recently discovered cista that seemed, he stated innocently, “... almost made on purpose for the subject of a lecture on the Birthday of the City” (Brunn 1864: 356). The engravings on the *cista*’s lid illustrated characters such as Aeneas, Latinus, Turnus, and Lavinia, all familiar from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (cf. 12.161ff.), although they were not depicted in a specific scene from the epic. Most members of the audience were also not troubled by the fact that Virgil composed his work more than five centuries *after* the

bronze engravers at Praeneste supposedly made the artifact.² However, within a few years, various scholars began to question the authenticity of the lid engravings. Later, after the deaths of both Martinetti and von Brunn, examinations revealed that while the lid itself was original, its engravings had been added, probably by Martinetti in 1863 (De Puma 2000).



Figure 29.1 The bronze lid of the so-called Cista Pasinati, with engravings added by Italian forger, Francesco Martinetti, in 1863. London, The British Museum.

Drawing: Brunn 1864: pl. VII (top).

Similar problems occur with Praenestine bronze mirrors, some also excavated by Martinetti, and other unengraved or minimally engraved bronze mirrors from numerous Etruscan sites. The motivation is simple: museums and collectors are not especially interested in plain, undecorated ancient mirrors. Ones with elegantly engraved and recognizable narratives are far more desirable and valuable. If one has a blank mirror, why not simply add an engraved scene, something copied from an already-published mirror or, better still, wholly invented? We thus have many authentic bronze mirrors (chemical analysis proves them to be authentic) enhanced with modern engraved scenes. Some are so skillfully executed as to evade modern detection.

There are many other “Etruscan” mirrors that are wholly modern. They now seem as if they could not possibly have deceived anyone – but they did. A good example will suffice to illustrate this type of forgery. In 1955, the University Museum in Philadelphia acquired a magnificent engraved bronze mirror (Figure 29.2) from a New York art gallery. At the time, the Philadelphia curator sent photographs and measurements to one of the world’s leading authorities on Etruscan mirrors, Guido Mansuelli (1916–2001). He recognized that the engravings were not ancient but had been copied from a well-known Attic red-figured kylix by the Sosias Painter, now in Berlin. However, despite the unparalleled and excessively large diameter of the disc,

he left open the possibility that the mirror itself might be ancient. It turns out that there is another mirror, unknown to Mansuelli or the curator in Philadelphia in 1955, that was probably made by the same modern forger. This second mirror, also extremely large and with engravings based on another Attic kylix in Berlin, this time by Peithinos, had been acquired by William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951). It is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (De Puma 2002: 57, figs. 4–5). Similarities in the engraving style and the mirrors themselves suggest to me that both works may be products of the same forger, probably someone working from published images of the Greek vases. Although a skilled engraver, this unknown artist was not familiar with the basic characteristics of original Etruscan mirrors. If this had been the case, he would not have made the discs so gigantic and would have realized the difference between tangs and handles. However, despite these problems, both forgeries were originally accepted as valuable ancient artifacts by a prominent private collector and museum (De Puma 2002; 2005). Indeed, they are impressive both in their scale and the confident precision of their engravings.

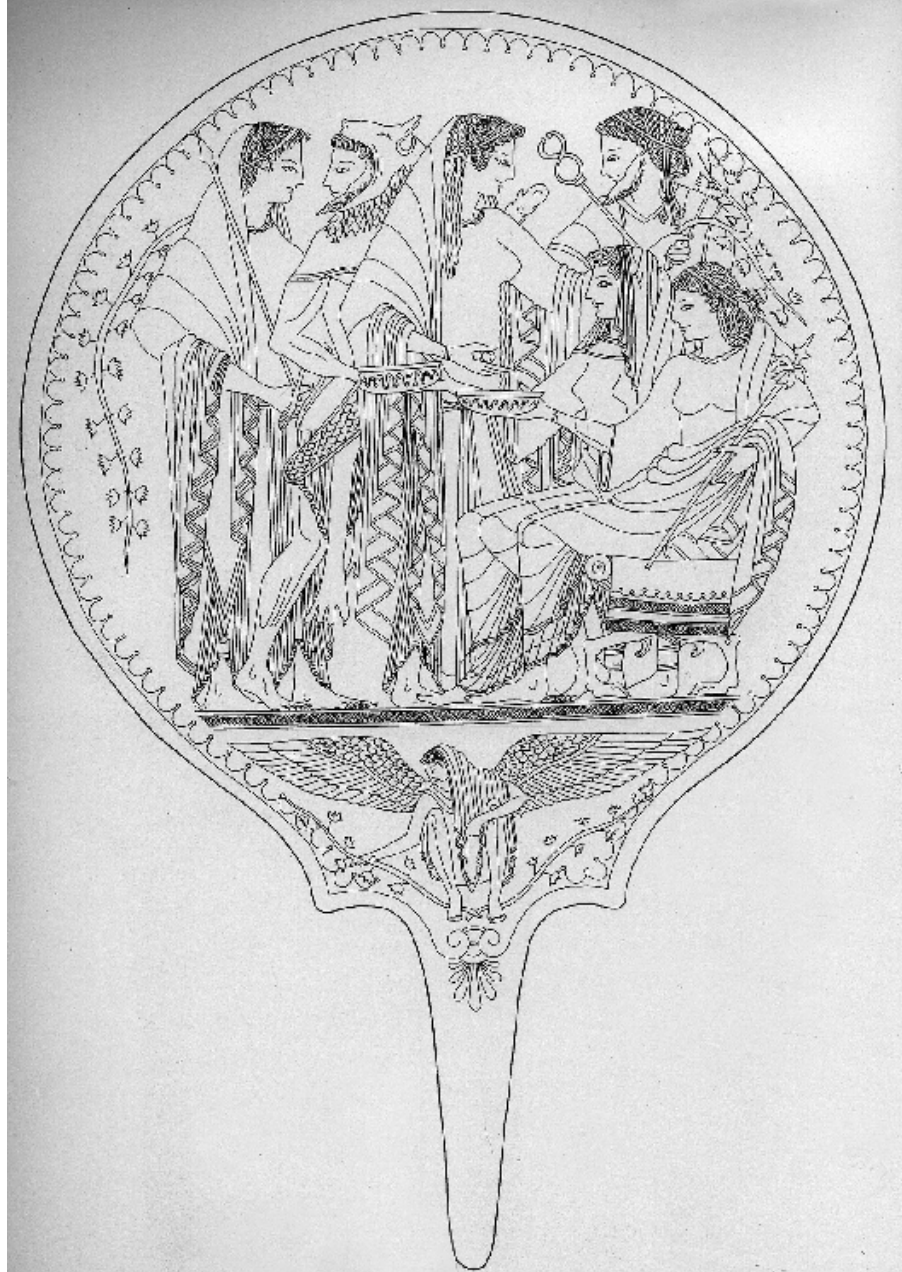


Figure 29.2 Engraved mirror (modern) with a gathering of the gods, late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Bronze. Probably produced in Italy. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, inv. 52-35-3.

Drawing: De Puma 2005: fig. 37a.

3. Etruscan Terracotta Forgeries

Perhaps the most famous Etruscan forgeries are the three magnificent terracotta warriors acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1915, 1916 and 1921. It is not difficult to understand the appeal of these impressive, brightly painted figures. They were made between 1914 and 1920 by the highly talented members of an extended Italian family working in Orvieto. These men were not only skilled artists but also clever con men who executed an elaborate “sting operation” that snared John Marshall (1862–1928), the Metropolitan Museum’s purchasing agent in Rome. The reconstructed details of this operation have been carefully outlined in earlier reports (von Bothmer and Noble 1961; Richter 1970: 92–93); suffice it to say here that Marshall’s decision to purchase the statues cannot be credited to naiveté. He was an experienced connoisseur, arguably one of the best of his generation when it came to Greek and Roman art (especially vases and classical sculpture). His acquaintance with Etruscan art was excellent but, as noted above, there was not that much large-scale Etruscan terracotta sculpture to see in the first decades of the twentieth century, and Etruscology was still in its infancy. Thus, there was almost no excavated material to compare with these new statues. For instance, the Aplu from Veii, while discovered in 1916, was not restored and published until the excavator, Giulio Quirino Giglioli, did so in 1926. This was five years after the Museum had purchased the Big Warrior, the last of the three terracottas acquired by Marshall. Of course, Marshall had seen all of these figures only in very fragmentary states.

Marshall was told that the terracotta statues came from the ruins of a recently-discovered Etruscan temple and that, because they represented warriors, it was probably a temple of Mars. All three figures had been smashed into numerous fragments but were restored after their arrival in New York. They were not publicly displayed until 1933, almost a decade after the last of the three figures had arrived in New York and five years after Marshall’s death. Gisela M.A. Richter (1882–1972), the curator at the Metropolitan, published them fully after four more years had elapsed (Richter 1937).

Provenance was always a problem. The forgers had reluctantly and tantalizingly revealed that the alleged temple site was in a field near Boccaporco, a tiny hamlet south of Orvieto. On numerous occasions Marshall tried to have the Italians arrange a visit, but he was always put off with excuses. At one point, they agreed to take him there but when they arrived, they were kept back by a uniformed policeman who firmly announced that the entire area was off-limits due to recent archaeological discoveries. Much later it was learned that the “policeman” was yet another cousin dressed for the occasion in a borrowed uniform. In 1955 when Richter tried to visit the site, she was told that a fountain had been built over the area and that there was no longer anything to see.

There was no reference to the alleged provenance in the first publications of the statues. Richter (1937: 16, 18) mentions in passing that the three statues "... are said to have been found together." She assumes that they were in a temple but never refers to the specific site that Marshall had attempted to visit at Boccaporco.³

Once the statues were finally exhibited almost everyone, scholars and the public alike, thought they were magnificent masterpieces of late sixth century BCE Etruscan art. Photographs of these precious terracottas soon made their way into numerous books on ancient art. David Moore Robinson (1880–1958), one of America's foremost archaeologists, also declared, in a review of Richter's 1940 *Handbook of the Etruscan Collection*: "There are no better examples of Etruria's prime and of the triumphant strength and splendor and military prowess of the Etruscans" (1944: 410).⁴ This praise echoes Richter's assessment that the statues "show us more forcibly than anything has heretofore [Etruria's] triumphant strength during her prime ... They reflect the dauntless spirit of Etruria at the time of her greatest military strength" (1937: 5). She believed that the two standing warriors were votive offerings and that the colossal head was part of an enormous cult statue: "A polychrome terracotta Mars about twenty feet high standing in the dim light of an Etruscan temple must indeed have been an impressive sight" (Richter 1937: 16, 18).

However, as early as 1937, the young Massimo Pallottino (1909–1995), who would go on to become one of the leading Etruscologists of the twentieth century, published articles condemning all three statues on stylistic grounds and positing sources of inspiration for two of them.⁵ This situation – scholarly arguments over the authenticity of one, two or all three statues – continued for almost 25 more years. In the late 1950s, new methods of dating terracotta were developed, and spectrographic analysis of the glaze material eventually demonstrated that all three statues were modern forgeries (von Bothmer and Noble 1961). In fact, one of the forgers was still alive. Alfredo Adolfo Fioravanti, at the time working as a furniture restorer, tailor, and taxi driver in Rome, confessed to having worked with the Riccardi brothers, his late cousins, to produce the last of the three warriors. He also confessed that he had created other (architectural) terracotta forgeries sold to collectors and museums in New York, Rome, and Mannheim (von Bothmer and Noble 1961: 14–15). All of this was recorded in sworn testimony on January 5, 1961 before the American consul in Rome. Among many other things, Fioravanti revealed significant details concerning the process used to make the Metropolitan Museum's statues, supplied a missing thumb fragment he had kept as a souvenir of the Big Warrior, and explained why the statues had been broken before firing. The answer was simple: they were too big to fit into any kiln available to the forgers at the time. Richter had offered vague reasons to explain such oddities as the heavy proportions of the Big Warrior's upper body: "... the abnormally stocky proportions are simply due to Etruscan

workmanship” or “... the curious proportions of the thighs and arms are more understandable in Etruria, where a lack of feeling for true proportions was not unusual even in the late archaic period” (Richter 1937: 8, 11). Fioravanti’s explanation was more credible. He said that he and his cousins had built the statue up from its feet to the waist, using published illustrations of the Dodona bronze warrior statuette in Berlin (Antikensammlung, Charlottenburg, inv. 7470; Löwy 1911: pl. 12, fig. 31). But then they realized that the room in which they were working was not high enough to continue with the correct proportions. The upper body had to become stockier in order for the statue to fit in their cramped studio. Details such as this demonstrate the convolutions that scholars who are seduced by a forgery will go to in order to justify their belief that an object is authentic.

Another group of terracottas presents different problems. These are statuettes each representing a seated human figure, mostly female, wearing heavy drapery. Most of these figures sit on truncated box-like containers that supposedly once held the ashes of the deceased. The ashes could be deposited through small rectangular holes (some examples preserve terracotta doors) in the backs of the figures. Scholars consider these objects late Etruscan works dating around 150–100 BCE, and they are usually “said to have come from” Chiusi or neighboring sites like Sarteano or Solaia. It is important to realize, however, that none has a secure, documented provenance, let alone an archaeological context.⁶ Most are about two feet (61 cm.) tall. There are at least 11 examples in public collections in Europe and America. Only two of these (Figures 29.3 and 29.4), acquired by Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History in 1910 and never published, have been subjected to careful scientific scrutiny. In turn, the findings they provide have implications for the others in the related group.



Figure 29.3 Terracotta cinerary urn in the form of a seated male figure, nineteenth century forgery. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History.

Photo: R. D. De Puma.



Figure 29.4 Terracotta cinerary urn in the form of a seated female figure, nineteenth century forgery. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History.

Photo: R. D. De Puma.

Chiusi is well-known for its virtually continuous practice of cremation during the Etruscan period. The first question we should ask is: Are there other seated-figure cinerary urns from the Chiusi area? Yes, there are several. The earlier examples include the well-known series of canopic urns, many placed on associated “thrones” of terracotta or bronze, as well as the more naturalistic stone cinerary urn of a seated man discovered in the Poggio Gaiella tumulus at Chiusi in 1839–40 and now in Palermo (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 96–97, figs. 64–65; Donati 2007; for canopic urns, see Gempeler 1974). A famous example, the so-called *Mater Matuta* from c.450 BCE shows a seated woman holding a swaddled infant. It was discovered at Chianciano in 1846 and is now in the Museo Archeologico, Florence (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 129–130, figs. 182–183). Returning to the undocumented late terracotta examples, we see that they belong to a longstanding tradition of anthropomorphizing ash containers that goes back to at least the early sixth century BCE.

Perhaps the most disconcerting feature of these late cinerary urns is the strangely exaggerated drapery the seated figures wear (Johansen 1966). Perhaps this can be explained as a result of the often provincial or crude style of late Etruscan work. However, when the two Chicago urns were tested, the thermoluminescence results showed that they were modern and probably created between 100 and 150 years ago. In this regard it is interesting to note that in December 1891, Wolfgang Helbig (1839–1915) mentions in a letter to his Danish patron, Carl Jacobsen, that he had seen a number of fake Etruscan terracottas, figures wearing “baroque” folds of drapery, while visiting Sarteano, a town near Chiusi.⁷ His description is too imprecise to say that he saw either of these specific figures now in Chicago or even this type of seated-figure cinerary urn. Still, “baroque” is an appropriate description of their distinctive drapery style, and Sarteano is certainly in the right neighborhood.

Because the two terracotta urns in Chicago are definitely forgeries, does that mean that the closely related examples in European museums are also forgeries? Not necessarily. However, because all of the other examples are so similar in size, style, subject, technique and material, I strongly suspect they are. They may all be products of an Italian workshop producing terracotta urns in the late nineteenth century, perhaps at Chiusi. It is also possible that they were not made to deceive, but simply to supply a busy tourist trade interested in purchasing souvenirs. But then how do we explain that almost all the examples now in museums were purchased directly from dealers, rather than donated by collectors? (And, of course, even dealers and collectors can be the targets of forgers.) The only way to be certain about their authenticity is to subject all of them to thermoluminescence testing. Perhaps eventually this will be done.

4. Conclusions

Although space does not permit an investigation into other types of Etruscan forgeries such as jewelry, carved gems and ambers, ivories, coins, painted pottery, bucchero, small bronzes, architectural and votive terracottas, and fresco fragments, examples exist in public and private collections. The Law of Supply and Demand is the basic principle. Sometimes, a specific group or person is targeted. Fakes often seduce experts because they so desperately want to believe that an especially interesting or attractive object is genuine. Forgers know this and often exploit it with surgical precision (e.g., Brunn and the Cista Pasinati; Marshall and Richter and the Metropolitan Museum's terracotta warriors). We see that the motivations for making forgeries can vary from simple financial gain to a perverse desire to deceive or to enhance one's fame and reputation. To some personalities, it is very satisfying to know that you have fooled numerous experts even though you may have kept the deception hidden from your closest friends. In many cases, forgeries are not discovered until long after the forger's death.

We have seen that, in the case of Etruscan art, there are many works like authentic undecorated bronzes that invite enhancement with new engravings that will make them more attractive, interesting, and valuable. In addition, the rather undistinguished fragments of other authentic bronzes might be ingeniously combined to create a totally new pastiche. In such cases, chemical analysis of the alloy cannot indicate a forgery because the bronzes are themselves ancient. There is no foolproof method to authenticate objects without an archaeological provenance (and, sometimes, even this cannot be trusted). The safest, but by no means foolproof, procedure is to combine the subjective opinions of art historians, archaeologists, and other connoisseurs with the more objective results of scientific analyses. However, it should be noted that even scientific tests are not always entirely objective and often scientists disagree on how to interpret results or find some flaw in laboratory procedures.

However instructive, entertaining or attractive individual forgeries and their histories may be, they are essentially destructive because they alter or falsify our comprehension of the past (see further, [Chapter 30](#)). This is a serious problem, especially for the Etruscans, where little textual documentation survives and art assumes greater significance. Although scientific analyses are more sophisticated than they were a generation ago, so are the forgers. They and their creations will always be with us, continuing to affect and color our perception of the Etruscans.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

There are a number of valuable, book-length treatments of the subject of ancient art forgeries, with various levels of discussion of the Etruscans.

[Chapter 8](#) in the new catalogue to the Etruscan collections at the Metropolitan

Museum of Art (De Puma 2013) treats the terracotta warriors and several other Etruscan forgeries and pastiches in this major collection. Another study of material from the Metropolitan, written by a former director (Hoving 1996), provides a lively account treating many forgeries from different art historical periods. In the case of the Metropolitan's terracotta warriors, Hoving posits that Marshall may have been part of a conspiracy to trick the museum, something this author does not believe probable. Mark Jones's 1990 edited collection originates from a British Museum exhibition treating numerous forgeries from a wide variety of art historical periods, including the Etruscans. David Sox's 1987 book tells the fascinating story of Alceo Dossena, perhaps the most talented forger of the early twentieth century, who created a number of "Etruscan" terracotta sculptures sold to American museums. Another work by Sox (1991) provides a biographical account of E. P. Warren, John Marshall and their associates at Oxford and Rome, many of whom had a profound influence on the acquisition and appreciation of antiquities (and fakes) between 1890 and 1928. More broadly, Craddock's 2009 book provides authoritative examination of numerous scientific tools that help to determine the authenticity of antiquities.

NOTES

- 1 Note that Martinetti's surname is often misspelled "Marinetti" in the literature.
- 2 Brunn dated the cista to the fifth century BCE. Within a year of his lecture, Heinrich Nissen showed that this early date was impossible, but did not question the authenticity of the cista. Today scholars believe that most engraved Praenestine cistae were produced in the second half of the fourth century BCE. However, almost a century after Brunn's lecture was published, Andrew Alföldi (1963: 257) accepted the Cista Pasinati as an original work that he dated to the late third century BCE.
- 3 Marshall's first mention of Boccaporco is in a lengthy letter of August 3, 1917 to Edward Robinson, third director of the Metropolitan Museum. Relevant portions of the letter are quoted by Bothmer and Noble (1961: 8–9).
- 4 He also claims to have seen the statues around 1914 at Chiusi, but this is impossible because only one of them, the so-called Old Warrior, had been made at that time, if we are to accept Fioravanti's later testimony. For a contrary view, see Johnson 1966: 373.
- 5 On April 7, 1936 Richter received a letter from Piero Tozzi, an Italian art dealer with galleries in New York and Florence. He told her that during a

recent visit to Rome he had heard that the statues were complete fakes and learned the names of the forgers: “Fioravanti–Riccardi Bros. Teodoro.” The brothers (Riccardo, Amedeo, Gino and Fausto) were the four sons of Pio Riccardi. Teodoro (and his brother, Virgilio Angelino) were the sons of Alfonso Riccardi, Pio’s brother. Therefore, Teodoro was a cousin of the Riccardi brothers. In 1936 this family was known to Richter, at least by name, and Marshall had mentioned several of them. But she had never heard of Fioravanti who, it turned out, was another cousin. Richter set to work investigating this lead. Marshall had not mentioned Fioravanti and had died in 1928, so she contacted his secretary in Rome, Annie Rivier. She eventually discovered that Fioravanti had been a tailor but was now a taxi driver living in Rome. Richter concluded that, with so little apparent artistic ability, he could not possibly be a forger. Of course, much later it turned out that Tozzi’s account was completely accurate.

- 6 Three examples formerly in Florence, but recently transferred to the Museo Civico Archeologico in Sarteano, were acquired in 1883 and are said to have come from Solaia. A fourth example, said to have come from Bettolle, is now lost. It is first mentioned in 1877 (Chigi Zondadari 1877: 305) but was never illustrated; it depicted a seated female. Apparently, four more examples in Arezzo came from Lucignano, southwest of Arezzo, but the circumstances of their acquisition are vague. The example in Copenhagen was accessioned in 1895. Excluding the lost example that possibly came from Bettolle, all but one of these are considered authentic Etruscan works dating to the second century BCE by their respective museums, and most are exhibited.
- 7 A few years later, Luigi Milani expressed doubts concerning most of the examples of this type of terracotta cinerary urn that he knew (Milani 1898: 64 and 151 n. 69). He mentions that he purchased a number of these figures for himself and studied them carefully, finding it difficult to detect the authentic from the fake. He concluded that the forgers (he believed that they were based in Chiusi) were unable to duplicate the vestiges of polychromy still adhering to several of those he thought were original. Milani, then the director of the Museo Archeologico in Florence, believed that two of the three cinerary urns he had acquired for his museum in 1883 (inv. nos. 72727 and 72728) were authentic, but an uninventoried smaller example depicting a woman holding a serpent, was a forgery. All three of these are now displayed at Sarteano. The two considered authentic are illustrated by Alessandra Minetti (1997: 95–96, figs. 100–101). Flemming Johansen (1966: 383) believed that the two cinerary urns in Florence were authentic provincial Etruscan works of the early first century BCE. The Chicago examples (Figures 29.3–4) also retain some polychromy, but in my opinion this detail only demonstrates the skill of the forger. I believe that all three terracottas now in Sarteano, as well as those in Arezzo and

Copenhagen, are forgeries.

CHAPTER 30

Looting and the Antiquities Trade

Gordon Lobay

1. Losing Context: An Introduction to Looting in Central Italy

This volume provides a wide perspective on Etruscan economic, political, and religious structures; it also highlights the importance of the ways in which archaeologists obtain the necessary information that informs our understanding of Etruscan society, art, and culture. While the beautiful and unique aesthetics of Etruscan artifacts provide an obvious source of information (see e.g. [Chapter 24](#)), in order to complete the picture of what we can learn using archaeological enquiry, the context of the findspot, or *provenience* (vertical and horizontal location) of the artifact in the ground must be carefully recorded (Renfrew and Bahn 1996: 46). This contextual information enables archaeologists to examine the relationship of artifacts to each other and to the various other remains contained within an archaeological site, such as human or animal bones, architectural structures, and a myriad of other items that make up the material culture of past civilizations. It is also used to examine a site's relationship to others in the surrounding area and to the landscape itself. However, if an artifact is removed from its context without systematic recording, all available archaeological data are eliminated. A good analogy would be a modern crime scene where forensic specialists require the entire scene to be left undisturbed prior to investigation (Lobay 2009: 61).

The term *provenience* (archaeological findspot) must be differentiated from another frequently-used term, *provenance*, which describes the post-excavation history of an artifact (Coggins 1995). While provenance should not be diminished in importance, *provenience* is crucial to efforts to reconstruct the deepest understanding of an object and, moreover, the ancient history of a particular culture. A documented archaeological *provenience* also lends greater weight to art historical connoisseurship since it tethers an artifact to a particular place and time, important in analyses of stylistic forms in particular regions and time periods (Marlowe 2013). Many different terms are used to describe ancient objects; here I will define them as artifacts or antiquities from the pre-Roman period in central Italy roughly corresponding to the dates 900 to 300 BCE. In addition, while the Etruscans will be the main focus of this chapter, the discussion will consider the other pre-Roman Italic

cultures of central Italy, such as the Villanovans and Faliscans. And while the objects themselves are collectively known as cultural property, which is itself broadly defined, I focus below primarily on “movables,” such as art works, tools, pottery, and sculpture (Prott and O’Keefe 1992: 307–308).

The Scale and History of Looting in Central Italy

Central Italy has a long history of illegitimate archaeological excavations (see further, [Chapter 29](#)). Interest and demand for Etruscan remains emerged in the Renaissance and gained momentum in Tuscany during the sixteenth-century reign of Cosimo de’Medici (Spivey 1997). This demand quickened pace during the so-called Etruscomania of the eighteenth century, when Etruscan archaeology and history was widely exported through the Grand Tours and highlighted by well-known intellectuals such as J.J. Winkelmann, Josiah Wedgwood, and Sir William Hamilton (Jenkins and Sloan 1996; Spivey 1997). The four volumes of George Dennis’s *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* provide a detailed account of his travels through central Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. They reveal important information on the state of preservation and condition of archaeological sites at the time. Dennis’s work also highlights the breadth and intensity of looting and, to the modern scholar, the long history of demand for Etruscan and pre-Roman antiquities.

Looting has impacted the entire region, where it is estimated that there are approximately 500,000 tombs in southern Etruria alone (Spivey 1997: 194). Most tombs contain, along with at least one human skeleton, many artifacts. When the various types of archaeological sites – from camps and huts to villas and temples and many more – are added together the possible number in existence is huge, and the corresponding number of artifacts available is truly vast. The looting of Etruscan archaeological sites increased after the Second World War, particularly during the 1950s (Thoden van Velzen 1996). Estimates suggest that in excess of 2000 tombs have been looted around Veii alone, with similar levels of destruction around Tarquinia and Cerveteri (Conforti 2001: 47). The geophysical surveys of Carlo Lerici in the 1960s provided further evidence of the rampant extent of looting in Tuscany and Lazio (Latium). In 1962 Lerici discovered clear and significant instances at Cerveteri and demonstrated that 400 of the 550 tombs investigated had been looted since the Second World War (Lerici 1962: 18–21). He also notes a link between seasonal employment and looting; for instance, during the winter when there is less work in agriculture or the tourism industry, looting increases (Lerici 1962: 18). Italy’s Carabinieri, recovered in excess of 300,000 looted antiquities between 1970 and 1996 (Slayman 2006: 44) and around 100,000 more between 1997 and 2001 (Pastore 2001: 159).

The Social Network of Looting

The process of looting and trading illicit antiquities can take many forms, but a common route is for a looter to sell an artifact to a local middleman who, in turn, sells it to other middlemen and dealers who have international links (Kersel 2006; Campbell 2013). The artifact continues moving in this manner (steadily increasing its selling price) until it enters a private collection or the international antiquities market where, if sold, it may then pass into private hands, possibly into a museum or to other dealers. Whether the artifact sells or not, it may re-emerge on the market at a later date.

The process starts with an illegal excavation; looters (known as *tombaroli*) find sites through familiarity with the landscape and the study of crop phenomena (Thoden van Velzen 1996; Ruiz 1999, 2001). The surface of the earth above many sites can be identified by a discoloration compared to the surrounding area (Graepler and Mazzei 1993; Thoden van Velzen 1996). As demonstrated by Thoden van Velzen (1996) in her investigation of the social network of looting in central Italy, and by Graepler and Mazzei (1993) in their study of looting in southern Italy, the physical act of looting proceeds in steps. Looters probe the earth over probable sites using long metal rods (*spilloni*), which are up to four meters in length and have a small handle welded to one end. This is an effective means of searching for subterranean voids or the blockages that sometimes indicate the presence of archaeological sites; the use of *spilloni* also speeds up prospecting (George 2005; Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 33). Once a new site is discovered, it is marked using rock piles or plastic sheeting. When night falls, looters return and “excavate” it using shovels and pick axes; only the most valuable artifacts are removed (Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 34–38).

Thoden van Velzen (1996) observed that looters in central Italy had unintentionally exploited a noticeable gap in scholarly research. While archaeologists principally excavated the larger rock-cut or mound-style Etruscan tombs (see further, [Chapter 11](#)), the less grand but often artifact-rich Hellenistic *fossa* tombs remained relatively unstudied. Widely known to the *tombaroli*, *fossa* tombs provide a significant resource for plunder. This example, moreover, clearly indicates one of the ways in which looting directly impacts our understanding of the archaeology of central Italy; it disproportionately displaces contexts and artifacts from specific tomb groups. Thoden van Velzen (1996) also discusses two biographical volumes by looters, one by Omero Bordo (Cecchelin 1987) and another by Luigi Perticarari (Perticarari and Giuntani 1986). Both accounts describe social mores amongst central Italian looters, as well as the ways that they locate and “excavate” sites, and their broader networks with middlemen and dealers.

The act of removing antiquities from Italy takes place in similarly numerous ways. Means of removal, or smuggling, include transporting objects in

commercial vehicles, breaking ceramics into smaller pieces for carriage by hand and many other processes designed to conceal antiquities as they cross the border (Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 50; Pastore 2001: 156–57; Felch and Frammolino 2011). Once an artifact leaves Italy, tracing it becomes problematic. Once it has been laundered through many different hands and over many borders, proving which in country an artifact originated and when it left that country, becomes exceedingly difficult (Gerstenblith 2007). A first stop for many artifacts on their way to key markets is a transit nation (Kersel 2006), with the best-known example being Switzerland, which formerly had relatively relaxed import and export controls (Weber 2006).

The importance of Switzerland as a transit nation for central Italian antiquities was made disturbingly clear by the large-scale operation and network of the notorious Giacomo Medici, a middleman and dealer who had what could be described as a storeroom in the Geneva Freeport that even functioned as a sale room (Watson 1997; Watson and Todeschini 2006). Medici was a key figure in the looting of central Italy from the 1970s to the early 1990s. He would buy antiquities directly from looters for relatively low prices and then sell them to wealthy collectors. He was even known to have consigned antiquities to auctions, only to have acquaintances purchase them back on his behalf in order to inflate prices (Watson and Todeschini 2006; Felch and Frammolino 2011). Perhaps his most famous transaction was his middleman role in purchasing the famed Euphronios krater ([Figure 30.1](#)) from looters and selling it to Robert Hecht, a well-known dealer who, in turn, sold it to the Metropolitan Museum in 1972 for what was, at the time, an incredible price: \$1 million (Watson 1997; Waxman 2008). Medici has also been linked to unprovenanced artifacts in many major museums, including the Getty Museum, one of whose curators, Marion True, was tried in an Italian court as a collaborator (Watson and Todeschini 2006).



Figure 30.1 Attic red-figure calyx krater by Euphronios with Hypnos and Thanatos carrying the body of Sarpedon off the battlefield, 520–510 BCE. From Caere. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia.

Photo: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Medici was first revealed to the Italian authorities through the investigation of a network of looters. After the accidental death of Pasquale Camarra (a leading member of his network), a search of his apartment in Rome turned up an organigram outlining the key members of the group (Watson and Todeschini 2006). In 2005, after a protracted investigation, Medici was

sentenced to 10 years in prison (later reduced to eight years) and ordered to pay €10 million to the Italian State in compensation (Silver 2009; Brodie 2015).

2. The Antiquities Market

The antiquities market can be defined in several ways: for instance, open trade occurs in auction houses, galleries, and dealers' shops. These "open" venues, however, are exclusive environments and – while the public may attend pre-auction artifact viewings, observe the auction sales itself, or visit dealers' shops – most people do not due to this perceived exclusivity. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned by observing auction sales and gaining an understanding of the market. The relative openness of the public market stands in contrast to the opaque nature of the invisible market, which is closed to observation or scrutiny except in exceptional circumstances – for instance, when access is granted by insiders (Thoden van Velzen 1996; Watson 1997) or as the result of police investigations (Watson and Todeschini 2006). The key point is that there is an element of access to the artifacts in the so-called open trade, with auction houses being the best example, since they publish consigned items in their catalogues and on their websites. Other open venues also allow access to data through their public-facing print and online offerings, although it is often inconsistent. Regardless, these materials allow researchers to capture useful data that can provide an important perspective on market activity.

The key markets for Etruscan antiquities are historically located in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Switzerland (both a transit and a market nation). Three auction houses – Bonhams, Christie's, and Sotheby's – are the highest-profile institutions; all were established in the eighteenth century and have extensive experience trading classical antiquities (Nørskov 2002: 253). Sotheby's, for instance, held its first dedicated antiquities auction in 1835 (Herrmann 1980: 229). Bonhams began holding regular antiquities auctions much later, in the early 1990s, but they have steadily consigned larger volumes of central Italian antiquities to auction (Lobay 2007). Bonhams' antiquities' sales increased especially after 1997, when Sotheby's discontinued antiquities auctions in London, partially due to reporting by Peter Watson, who demonstrated that the institution was aware of antiquities appearing in their sales which were illegally exported from their countries of origin (Watson 1997; Nørskov 2002: 253). In contrast to these auction houses are the dealers' shops and galleries which, as some have suggested, represent a gauge of the popular tastes for specific antiquities, whereas auctions reflect the total supply of objects available (Nørskov 2002). A sizeable market on the internet has also developed in recent years, but due to its fluid nature, methods

for capturing useful data remain unreliable (Lidington 2002).

Monitoring Market Activity

If the market drives the incentive to loot (Elia 1993; Renfrew 1993), then a better understanding of the relative demand for specific artifact types can help develop better protection strategies. Market data can be used in many applied ways, such as in assessing the impact of interventions (legislation and international agreements). Basic empirical research builds corpora of artifacts passing through the market, which allow for statistical studies of trends and provide a tool for investigating specific artifacts and artifact classes (Lobay 2007; 2009). Several corpus-based studies have been conducted that have built empirical datasets of classical antiquities appearing on the art market. Elia (2001), for instance, generated a world corpus of Apulian vases from the market, legitimate excavations, and art historical sources. Gill and Chippindale (1993) and Chippindale and Gill (2000) used quantitative analysis and focused on museum exhibitions and the consequences of looting. They demonstrated that 85 percent of antiquities from seven exhibitions were without provenance, and indicated the same percentage for objects on the auction market. Nørskov (2002) gathered a large dataset of Greek vases on the market and analyzed museum acquisitions.

Lobay (2007) took a regional-based approach specifically focusing on central Italy and analyzed both the scale of the market (see [Figure 30.2](#)) and trends in provenance descriptions through a content-analysis of 481 auction sales at Bonhams, Christie’s and Sotheby’s between 1970 and 2005. A large empirical dataset was gathered from a total of approximately 150,000 auction lots, resulting in the identification of around 7,000 antiquities from pre-Roman central Italy.

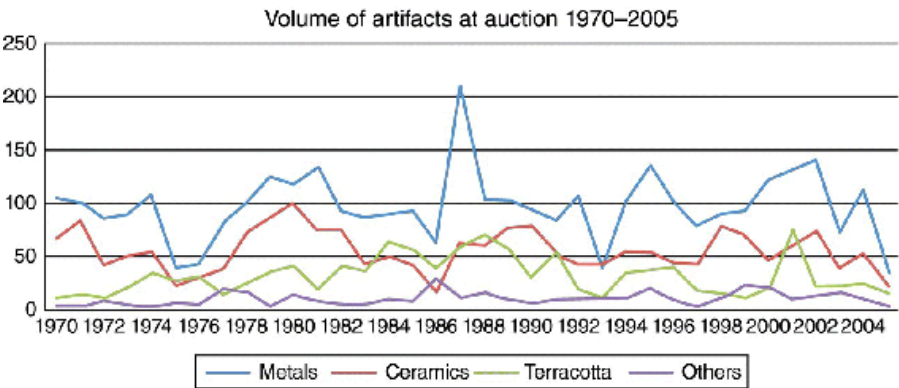


Figure 30.2 Volume of pre-Roman artifacts from central Italy consigned to auction at Bonhams, Christie’s, and Sotheby’s, 1970–2005.

Figure 30.3 shows that artifacts without a provenance have a high frequency, while those published in auction catalogues that included names of people increased at various times during the 35 year time period (e.g., during the mid-1970s, mid-1980s, and towards the end of the time period in 2002 and 2004). This study concluded that 72 percent of consigned antiquities were without a stated provenance, 23 percent included the name of a person, 3.4 percent noted the object had appeared in a previous sale, and 1.6 percent had only a vague provenance (Lobay 2007: 270).

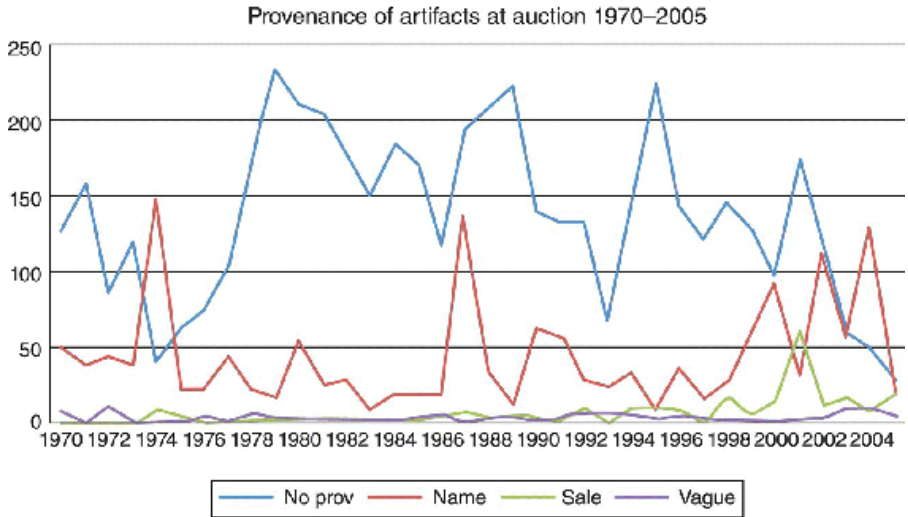


Figure 30.3 Published provenance of pre-Roman artifacts from central Italy consigned to auction at Bonhams, Christie’s, and Sotheby’s, 1970–2005.

Source: Lobay 2007: 135.

In order to put these data into the wider market context, it must be remembered that “only a small percentage of objects appear at public auctions ... Many more change hands privately and can be spotted only by seeking out dealers and collectors” (von Bothmer 1975: 114). The analysis by Nørskov (2002: 296) substantiates this point: “when comparing the acquisitions of selected museums with the art market supply, it is most striking that while museums acquired less and less, the supply of vases on the market grew steadily until the late 1980s.” She goes on to say that, “few of the vases acquired by museums were actually purchased through the auction and gallery catalogues used in the analysis of the market.”

Illicit antiquities research is also plagued by circular problems: one of these follows the economic paradigm that if demand remains unchanged or increases, and supply decreases, a shortage occurs, leading to increased prices (Besanko and Braeutigam 2005: 33). In relation to the antiquities trade, higher

prices increase the incentive to loot antiquities. This paradox of supply suggests that any regulation that has a negative impact on the supply of antiquities available to the market would increase prices and thereby the incentive to loot (Lobay 2009: 74). Secondly, and specifically related to Etruscan antiquities, is the paradox of aesthetics: the distinctive aesthetics of many artifacts is a great strength in that they can be easily identified out of context on the art market. This distinctiveness also represents a profound weakness since it is a key reason why they are in demand in the first place.

A good representation of this distinctiveness can be seen in a seventh-century BCE amphora ([Figure 30.4](#)) that belongs to a type found in localized areas north of Rome, such as at Crustumerium (di Gennaro 2009). Distinctive artifact types from central Italy are abundant and include bucchero pottery, bronze weapons, nenfro statuary, terracotta figurines, and many impasto vases. Recording the appearances of these distinguishable artifacts on the market builds datasets that can be used to evaluate and develop cultural property legislation, international agreements and other regulations, as well as to track known illicit antiquities suspected to have reached the market.



Figure 30.4 Impasto amphora with molded handles, seventh century BCE, sold in 2003 (Lot 185 Bonhams).

Photo: By permission of Bonhams.

The model developed by Lobay (2007) provides a template for monitoring the market; originally applied to auctions, it is applicable to any market from which data can be collected. Its key features are:

- **Volume:** the number of distinguishable artifacts on the market within a specified period of time;
- **Artifact description:** detailed descriptions of artifacts (including an image if possible);
- **Prices:** stated price, estimated price (if at auction) and if available, the realized price (the amount actually paid for the artifact);
- **Provenance:** details from market sources can be classified into a further four categories:
 - **Name:** names of people, such as former owners or others associated with the artifact;
 - **No Provenance:** no supporting details whatsoever or unusable information, such as “acquired by the present owner as a 21st birthday present in 1960” (Bonhams, *Antiquities*, 21 April 2005, Sale ID 11597, lot 438);
 - **Previous Sale:** information about past sales in which the artifact appeared, such as in dealers’ shops or auctions;
 - **Vague:** overly broad geographical region (e.g., Italy), dates of acquisition (without the name of an owner), or other details that cannot be corroborated.

Gathering data in a systematic manner such as this allows researchers to monitor market activity of specific artifacts from specific regions (see [Figures 30.2](#) and [30.3](#)), while also developing an inventory of artifacts that have appeared on the market. This toolkit of market data is essential in developing testable hypotheses that can be used to evaluate legislation and international agreements aimed at protecting antiquities.

3. National and International Approaches to Protecting Central Italian Antiquities

Countries protect cultural property through strategies that address both the demand for antiquities and the sources of antiquities (O’Keefe 1997: 12). This layered approach to regulation “is necessary in order to preserve cultural property and to support its proper international circulation” (Merryman 2005: 12). In Italy, strategies include “on the ground” policing, national legislation, directives from the European Union (EU), adherence to international

conventions, bilateral agreements with other countries, and, increasingly, social persuasion.

Italian-based Protection Strategies

The archaeological, artistic, and archival patrimony of Italy is protected and managed by a system of *soprintendenze* who maintain monuments, conduct and monitor archaeological excavations, and oversee fieldwork undertaken within their respective jurisdictions by both Italian and foreign institutions (di Gennaro 2009). Despite the many legal instruments available, a few of which will be discussed below, the framework in Italy is, in many ways, insufficient to deal with the scale of looting and illegal trading on a legislative, judicial, and even investigative level (Pastore 2001: 160). In 1969, Italy created a police unit, the *Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Artistico*, which was charged with protecting cultural property (Pastore 2001: 158–159). Under the command of General Roberto Conforti during the 1990s, it was steadily strengthened, and by 2006, the Unit (popularly referred to as the “Art Squad”) was no longer just a Rome-based staff of 60 but a connected network staffed by 250 individuals (Pastore 2001: 158; Watson and Todeschini 2006).

Italy’s principal legislative source of cultural property protection is based on Law 1089 (1939), which declares all archaeological items as property of the State (Pastore 2001: 158). New discoveries must be declared to the State with penalties of up to three years imprisonment for finders that fail to do so. Building on Law 1089, Decree 288 (July 5, 1972) addresses the illegal trade in art and antiquities and provides rules on the exportation of objects of historical and archaeological interest (Pastore 2001: 158). Law 88 (March 30, 1998) focuses on the circulation of cultural goods and the restitution of cultural property that has illegally left the territory of an EU member state (Frigo 2001: 323). Italy has also passed several European Community (EC) Directives relating to the protection and export of cultural properties, such as EC Regulation 3911/92, Directive 93/7/EEC, and the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (di Gennaro 2009: 121; Frigo 2001: 317). Directive 93/7/EEC obliges EU member states to return illicit objects located within its jurisdiction to another member state.

International Conventions

After the Second World War, many nations recognized the need for a global approach to the protection of cultural and natural heritage as rapid post-war development endangered the very resources that were proving so valuable for economic expansion (Magness-Gardiner 2004: 27). Individual nations were

solely responsible for their cultural property, which meant constructing unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral agreements to protect antiquities and cultural objects. Papa Sokal (2006) explains that, during the post-war period, it was also deemed necessary to address the problem of illegally traded art and archaeology. This issue was then raised at the 1960 UNESCO General Conference, and a resolution was passed that called for a report on illicit imports, exports, and sales of cultural property.

In 1969, UNESCO proposed a preliminary draft of a convention, which was passed to member states for comment and, a year later, the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (the 1970 Convention) was established. The 1970 Convention comprises 26 articles that form a set of guidelines which can be enacted by signatory nations to help reduce looting, theft, and illegal exports of cultural property (Prott 1998: 205; Merryman 2005). However, it is not self-executing, meaning that signatory nations may be obliged to create or adjust legislation to allow the 1970 Convention to take effect. The 1970 Convention provides a legislative framework that encourages clear channels between signatory nations to recover unlawfully-removed cultural property and prevent the import of cultural objects acquired illicitly (Palmer 2000: 20–21). At the time of writing, it has been adopted by 124 countries, making it valuable as a means of recovering unlawfully-removed cultural property.

In 1984, UNESCO requested that UNIDROIT, the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law, develop provisions that would enhance the effectiveness of the 1970 Convention (McManamon and Morton 2000: 251). The resulting 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects aimed to develop uniformity in international law between nations, with the intention of closing existing loopholes (Siehr 1992). It was designed to favor the dispossessed owner of an object over the good-faith purchaser, and encourage purchasers to exercise a higher degree of due diligence in determining a legitimate provenance (Prott 1998: 205). Article 3(1), for example, states that “the possessor of a cultural object which has been stolen shall return it” (Siehr 1993: 96), but it does not distinguish definition of theft or return to whom. This relative lack of clarity was a key reason why only 24 nations acceded to the Convention, thus diminishing its effectiveness as a global mandate.

US-Italy Bilateral Agreement

The United States did not have a comprehensive policy regarding the international movement of cultural property until 1983 when the Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA) was enacted, which allowed the US to

implement Articles 7b and 9 of the 1970 Convention (Herscher 1989: 117; Guthrie-Hingston 1989: 131). These articles authorize governments to enforce import restrictions on cultural property stolen from inventoried collections in states party to the 1970 Convention (Magness-Gardiner 2004: 33; Papa Sokal 2006: 70–71). Article 7b allows the US government to take steps to recover and return property in response to a request from member states (Papa Sokal 2006: 70). Article 9, as implemented by the US, allows the government to create and enter into bilateral and multilateral agreements involving import controls (Magness-Gardiner 2004: 33; Papa Sokal 2006: 72). Bilateral agreements can be entered into when nations request a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU must be on the basis that cultural objects of the requesting nation are at risk due to looting, and that restricting those objects from entering the American antiquities market would reduce the incentive to loot (Kouroupas 1995). Bilateral agreements last for five years and are renewable indefinitely, as long as the conditions of the CPIA continue to be met as they relate to the designated cultural property (Chechi 2009: 155). The agreement with Italy came into effect on January 19, 2001 and has been renewed in 2006 and 2011; a third renewal process is underway. It restricts imports to America of specific artifact types, which are outlined in a Federal Register and which include stone, metal, ceramic, glass, and wall paintings ranging from the ninth century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Using a dataset of pre-Roman antiquities from central Italy, I have shown elsewhere that, in relation to the artifacts studied, this bilateral agreement has not achieved the effect of reducing the incentive to loot sites: rather, the volume of antiquities reaching the auction market increased by 39 percent over the time period covered (Lobay 2009: 71). However, data suggest the agreement has contributed to encouraging auction houses to pay more attention to provenance, as evidenced by a 20 percent increase in consigned antiquities which include the name of a specific individual appearing in auction catalogues during the study period, (Lobay 2009: 72). Previous sale details are increasingly used as a provenance for auction lots, which satisfies the agreement, since it is not retrospective and therefore does not apply to artifacts that have been located in the United States prior to its implementation. Unfortunately, even if verifiable, previous sale data only reveal the location of an artifact prior to 2001, not its legitimacy (Lobay 2009: 74).

International Measures

Integration of international approaches is necessary to combat the looting and illegal trading of antiquities more effectively. Recently, major market nations have begun to adjust their strategies, and many have ratified or accepted the

1970 Convention. Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK), two nations with strong markets for Etruscan artifacts, have enacted new legislation (Gerstenblith 2006: 76).

In 2005, Switzerland passed the Swiss Federal Act on the International Transfer of Cultural Property, or Cultural Property Transfer Act (CPTA) (Weber 2006: 100). This Act implements the 1970 Convention in a manner similar to the American model, with a focus on import restrictions, and permits the Swiss Federal Council to enter into agreements with other states party to the 1970 Convention (Gerstenblith 2006: 77). The provisions on due diligence, moreover, were clarified and strengthened to oblige importers of cultural property to ensure it was not stolen, lost against the will of its owner, illegally excavated, or illicitly imported (CPTA, Article 16, para 1; Gerstenblith 2006: 77; Weber 2006: 106).

The UK's art market is second in size only to America's, but the country's demand for central Italian antiquities exceeded America's (by volume of artifacts consigned at auction) in most years between 1970 and 2005 (Lobay 2007). The Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) strengthened the UK's criminal law by making it an offence to deal dishonestly in "tainted" cultural objects (Gerstenblith 2006: 76; Mackenzie 2011). It defined illicit antiquities as "tainted" when "excavated, or removed from a monument or other building or structure of historical, architectural or archaeological interest, and such excavation or removal constitutes an offence" (the 2003 Act, Sec 2; Mackenzie and Green 2008). The 2003 Act also closed a loophole in the Theft Act of 1968, which did not include specific provisions for "handling" or importing stolen property outside the UK for one's own benefit (Mackenzie and Green 2008). While the 2003 Act is a positive step, its utility is diminished because in order to commit an offence, it must be proved that an individual dealt with tainted artifacts "knowing or believing them to be tainted" (the 2003 Act, Sec 2; Mackenzie and Green 2008). In a market where provenance information is rare, any suspicions about the origins of an artifact are relatively easy to dismiss as unsubstantiated (Mackenzie and Green 2008). The 2003 Act has been evaluated by Mackenzie and Green (2009a), who found that it is unlikely to impact the trade in the UK or to reduce the incentive to loot antiquities.

Social Persuasion

Since the early 1990s, a movement has developed to document the consequences of looting and illegal trading on our understanding of ancient civilizations. This has led to shifts in attitudes towards looting, collecting and the antiquities trade. As noted in Alder (2001: 9), within the context of archaeological looting, "persuasion" can be used as a tactic in regulation. As

the arsenal of legal instruments and international agreements grows to meet the continually evolving problem of looting, social persuasion aimed at raising awareness of the consequences of looting is also having an influence.

The work of Clemency Coggins (1969) was seminal in highlighting the impact of looting in the 1960s, but relatively few voices persisted from the archaeological community through the 1970s and 1980s. It was only in the 1990s that Gill and Chippindale (1993) documented evidence linking looted cultural property with museums. Then, following the debate between Elia (1993; 2001) and Renfrew (1993; 2000) that coined the phrase, “collectors are the real looters,” the urgent need to dis-incentivize the practice came to the fore. In fact, the latter debate was a key factor in igniting the archaeological community’s concerted charge against the antiquities trade. Since the mid-1990s, many academic publications, government reports, and more recently, popular media and social networks (see Guide to Further Reading), have discussed and analyzed the debate between archaeologists and the trade. The current debates are significant and, it could be argued, are having a transformative effect on the antiquities market and the incentive to loot through their contextualization of the consequences of these practices. The presentation of these debates in the popular media is raising awareness of the issues amongst the general public and by moving the debate to public venues the practices of collectors are being challenged more widely and, it could be argued, the incentive to collect is diminishing, much in the way that the anti-fur, blood diamonds, and environmental movements have affected similar cultural changes (Campbell 2013: 137).

Recent Successes

The combination of major market nations accepting or ratifying the 1970 Convention, new legislation and international agreements, and various degrees of social persuasion have encouraged many source nations to move for the repatriation of looted antiquities from foreign museums. A significant case was Italy’s agreement with the J. Paul Getty Museum for the return of various artifacts in 1996, 1999, 2005 and 2007 (La Follette 2013). The 2005 trial of former Getty curator, Marion True, and her association with the middleman-dealer, Giacomo Medici, unlocked key details that prompted several other museums (such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Princeton University’s Art Museum) to return dubiously acquired artifacts to Italy. Several dealers and collectors, including Jerome Eisenberg, Shelby White, and the brothers Hicham and Ali Aboutaam, have followed suit (Felch and Frammolino 2011: 307).

Another important case involved the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, from which Italy won restitution of around 20 antiquities, including the Euphronios Krater (see [Figure 30.1](#)), which is now permanently housed in the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome. These restitution cases bring to light many details about the trade and those involved in looting, trafficking and laundering antiquities. Much has been written about them in both the popular press and academic circles, with comprehensive accounts in Watson (1997), Watson and Todeschini (2006), Waxman (2008), Felch and Frammolino (2011), and La Follette (2013).

Wider Debates

As stewards of heritage on behalf of the public, archaeologists, governments, art historians, and criminologists have a direct interest in antiquities and in the suppression of looting. Museums are also a key group. James Cuno, formerly the President and Director of the Art Institute of Chicago and now President and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust, has suggested a return to the partage system, which was relatively common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In partage, artifacts excavated legitimately are shared between the source nation and a foreign museum that led the excavation. The nation would hold ownership of the items it deems scientifically important and transfer ownership of a representative group of the remaining artifacts to the foreign institution, which could then remove them from the country (Cuno 2008: 55). Cuno also asserts, in relation to Italy, that the current system is based on nationalist and retentionist strategies that are inconsistent with the idea of a common cultural heritage (2008: 127–128).

Italy already has export-permitting provisions that allow artifacts to leave the country (di Gennaro 2009). As a means of reducing the market for antiquities and the incentive to loot, partage would not – considering the size of the market – remove enough artifacts from circulation or stop them from being highly valued. Without evidence to satisfy the above factors, withdrawing Italy's cultural property ownership rights is unreasonable and renders the argument more academic than practical.

4. Conclusion

There are signs that the rate of looting in Italy is slowing (Gill 2010), though reports continue to emerge of large-scale seizures, including multiple artifacts from different time periods and whole tombs, such as “a single tomb complex identified as belonging to the Etruscan Cacni family” (Povoledo 2013). Nevertheless, a reduced rate of looting is remarkable considering the

precarious economic climate since the 2008 financial crisis; that is, one would expect looting to increase when unemployment rates are high, and tourism and seasonal work are down. In the years preceding 2008, several significant legal and international agreements were established in major market nations that are building international cooperation in addressing the problem, while social persuasion continues to develop. The discovery of a fully intact Etruscan rock-cut tomb at Tarquinia dubbed in the media as the “Warrior Princess” (Ghose 2013; Lorenzi 2013) reminds us of the importance of the archaeological remains that require protection. While looting remains an ongoing problem, plagued by circular issues such as the paradoxes of supply and aesthetics, it is possible to cut through this confused situation by systematic monitoring of market activity. Despite the limitations to this approach, the distinctive nature of Etruscan archaeology allows researchers to distinguish artifacts out of context on the market and the resulting data are invaluable in building knowledge of the market. These analyses link artifacts currently on the market to specific regions, allow researchers to evaluate legislation and other protective measures, and inform the development of more effective national and international protection strategies. It is debatable whether the complete suppression of the antiquities market will ever be possible. Nevertheless, just as archaeologists record as much contextual information as possible from a site in the landscape, the same tactic can be taken with the antiquities market so that it can be monitored, quantified and, when necessary, investigated through evidence-based approaches.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Gill and Chippindale 1993 is a seminal work that outlines the consequences of looting on our knowledge of the archaeological record; it takes a quantitative approach to studying the antiquities trade. Brodie, Doole, and Renfrew 2001 is one of the key academic texts and a good starter for archaeology students interested in the study of illicit antiquities or those from other disciplines who are interested in a global perspective on the issue. Renfrew 2000 is a lively and accessible introduction for readers approaching the subject for the first time. Brodie et al. 2006 provides a wide-ranging, inter-disciplinary and accessible account of the study of illicit antiquities. Nørskov 2002 provides an outstanding market analysis of a large corpus of Greek vases, functioning, also, as a study of museum collections. Watson and Todeschini 2006 takes Watson’s previous investigative reporting on looting and the illegal trade (Watson 1997) to the next level and includes detailed accounts of Giacomo Medici and looters in central Italy. Di Gennaro 2009 offers an informative

view of legislation and various regulations applied to cultural property in Italy. Mackenzie and Green 2009 brings together archaeologists and criminologists to explore different ways of approaching research in illicit antiquities. Vrdoljak and Francioni 2009 is a highly technical report on looting and the legal protection of cultural property throughout the Mediterranean region.

A list of important websites and blogs focusing on looting, the art market and related heritage issues includes:

- Chasing Aphrodite: <http://chasingaphrodite.com/>;
- International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR): <http://www.ifar.org/home.php>;
- Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation (LCCHP): <http://www.culturalheritagelaw.org/>;
- Looting Matters (David Gill's blog): <http://lootingmatters.blogspot.co.uk/>;
- Saving Antiquities for Everyone (SAFE): <http://www.savingantiquities.org/>;
- Trafficking Antiquities: <http://traffickingculture.org/>;
- United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs: <http://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center>.

The above resources represent only a few of the books, journal articles, websites and blogs that share up-to-date news and analysis about looting and the illegal trade from around the world.

PART VI
Appendix

Appendix

Etruscan Art in North American Museums

Richard Daniel De Puma

This brief survey of some of the many public museums in North America that include Etruscan and Italic art will introduce the history of collecting Etruscan antiquities in this part of the world. It will also give readers an idea of cities to visit should they wish to see and study Etruscan art outside the major European collections. At the outset, it is important to realize that there are scores of college and university art museums, not to mention private collectors, that possess works of Etruscan art but that cannot be included in this necessarily short treatment.¹ Only two of the largest university museum collections, in Philadelphia and Berkeley, will be discussed here.

The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston was founded in 1870, the same year as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. As we shall see, three important connoisseurs of ancient art, Edward Robinson (1858–1931), John Marshall (1862–1928) and Edward Perry Warren (1860–1928), strongly influenced the antiquities collections of both museums in their early stages. The Etruscan collection at the Museum of Fine Arts is especially strong in stone sculpture, thanks to the 1886 acquisition of two magnificent sarcophagi from Vulci, brought to Boston by James Jackson Jarves in 1883.² The collection is also strong in Etruscan engraved mirrors, through the work of E. P. Warren, who either sold or donated the 11 mirrors the museum acquired between 1892 and 1903 (the entire collection of 31 mirrors is published in De Puma 1993). Other areas of significant holdings include pottery and an impressive tomb-group from Chiusi, acquired in 1913 (for the pottery, see Fairbanks 1928 and Padgett et al. 1993. For the tomb-group, which contains some of the best mirrors in the collection, see De Puma 2008a: 135–149; for the mirrors, see De Puma 1993: 7–45, nos. 15–25). In general, it can be said that Boston's approach to ancient art was very similar to that of the Metropolitan's: it stressed artistic quality and technical proficiency over archaeological relevance, and showed a decided bias to Greek art over both Etruscan and Roman. This common trend, no doubt, was reinforced by Edward Robinson, who was trained as a classical archaeologist in Europe, where Greek art took precedence. He worked at both museums. In his many letters to John Marshall, the Metropolitan's purchasing agent in Rome, he often stated his goals for building the collection.³

The Etruscan collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the largest and finest in North America. In 1903 the museum acquired two major Etruscan tomb-groups: the Monteleone di Spoleto tomb-group with its splendid bronze chariot (c.575–550 BCE) and the Bolsena tomb-group containing several inscribed silver, gold and bronze objects (c.300–275 BCE) (for this collection, see now De Puma 2008b and 2013; Emiliozzi 2011; and metmuseum.org). The Monteleone tomb-group is arguably the most important Etruscan tomb-group in any North American collection. The famous chariot is the most elaborate and best-preserved Etruscan example in the world. The quality of the bronzes in the museum's collection (statuettes, vessels, candelabra, incense burners, engraved mirrors) is exceptional. Other strong areas are bucchero pottery, Pontic ware and Volsinian silvered ware. The carved gems and gold jewelry, mostly acquired in 1881 and 1895, respectively, are additional areas of great beauty and interest (Richter 2006 (1956) 41–60; De Puma 2013: chap. VII). The museum also has one of the finest Etruscan and Italic amber collections, comprising more than 700 pieces.

The Walters Art Museum (called the Walters Art Gallery from its founding in 1934 until 2000) is the gift of Henry Walters to the city of Baltimore. Henry Walters (1848–1931) and his father William Thompson Walters (1819–94) were both avid art collectors and amassed an eclectic assortment of paintings, furniture, and antiquities. The Etruscan collection, almost exclusively the product of the younger Walters's interests, is rich in bronzes (especially engraved cistae and mirrors) and gold jewelry.⁴ The first curator of ancient art, Dorothy Kent Hill (1907–1986), was in many ways like her older friend and colleague at the Metropolitan, Gisela M. A. Richter (1882–1972). Both had begun work at their respective museums at the beginnings of their professional careers (Richter in 1906 and Hill in 1934, shortly after the Walters was founded), both rose to significant positions in their institutions and remained there until their retirements, and both published numerous articles about the antiquities they acquired in their museum periodicals and elsewhere. Another similarity is the interest that both curators took in the technical aspects of ancient art, Richter especially in pottery and stone sculpture, Hill in bronze casting and engraving. What the Etruscan collection at the Walters may lack in breadth and quantity, it makes up in quality.

A major academic collection is the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia. As a teaching collection, this museum amassed a wide range of material from many cultures, often as the result of excavations conducted by its faculty. However, the Etruscan material was mostly acquired by Arthur Lincoln Frothingham, Jr. (1859–1923), a Princeton archaeologist and art historian who was a major source in the 1890s for the Metropolitan, as well as for the Field Museum in Chicago. Because it was difficult for foreigners to obtain permission to excavate in Italy, Frothingham arranged to hire Italian archaeologists to supply him with

excavated tomb-groups that he could sell to his American and European clients. Thus, much of the material that came via Frothingham now in Philadelphia and Chicago consists of various tomb-groups mostly from Narce, Vulci, Poggio Buco, Tuscania (called Toscanella in the nineteenth century), Orvieto, Saturnia, and a few other sites. These tomb-groups were supposedly the entire contents of specific tombs, although normally skeletal material was not included (for Frothingham's methods, see De Puma and Brownlee 2013). In many cases, the materials are of inferior quality or very poorly preserved, but they do represent the context of a given burial site and thus can have important archaeological information about both regional and overseas trade contacts, relationships between different types and techniques of pottery or bronzes, and other features. This major source, which formed the basis for the Etruscan collection in Philadelphia, set the tone as archaeological, rather than aesthetic, although some artifacts could stand alone as isolated *objets d'art*.

The University of Pennsylvania Museum opened in 1899. It articulated "a collecting policy whereby it would be less interested in individual objects and more concerned with acquiring whole groups of objects covering a large chronological range which had come from scientific exploration and which would be accompanied by carefully and scientifically gathered documentation. The new Etruscan collection, with its complete and well-documented tomb-groups was a perfect example of the Museum's mission" (White et al. 2002: 2; in 2005 this collection became one of the few that is authoritatively published: Turfa 2005, with the review by Serra Ridgway 2006). In 1942 Edith Hall Dohan (1877–1943) published a major treatment of a selection of the museum's Etruscan tomb-groups: *Italic Tomb-Groups in the University Museum*. This meticulous study became the model for several later works investigating the various collections of Etruscan tomb-groups acquired by other museums during the late nineteenth century.

Two museums in the American Midwest have significant Etruscan collections. Established in 1893 for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Field Museum of Natural History has a collection of tomb-groups acquired, like those in Philadelphia, from Frothingham (these have been published by Davison 1972 and De Puma 1986). There is also a rich collection of Etruscan jewelry, several terracotta cinerary urns (see further, [Chapter 30](#)) and a series of monumental sculpted and painted stone sarcophagi.⁵ The monumental scale of several of these sarcophagi is unique for American collections. Unfortunately, almost all of this significant material has been in storage for more than 25 years. However, since 1994 several smaller Etruscan objects have been on loan to the Art Institute of Chicago where they are displayed with some of that museum's Etruscan collection (see De Puma 1994).

The Detroit Institute of Arts was founded in 1885. Its Etruscan collection is relatively modest but covers a representative range of Villanovan and Etruscan artifacts and possesses some excellent pieces, especially in the area

of bronze statuettes and sculpted stone cinerary urns (Caccioli 2009). Other Midwestern museums with small but often choice Etruscan holdings include the Cleveland Museum of Art, Toledo Museum of Art, St. Louis Art Museum, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City), Dayton Art Institute, and Cincinnati Art Museum.

In the South, the Dallas Museum of Art (founded in 1903 as the Dallas Art Association) had relatively little Etruscan art until 1991 when it acquired the ancient jewelry collection of Dr. Athos Moretti of Lugano. This impressive collection was built slowly from the 1930s to the 1960s and contains material from ancient Greece, Etruria, Rome, and the Near East (Deppert-Lippitz 1996; the Etruscan jewelry is treated on 31–57; 121–131). In the tradition of the Gilded Age, this is a good example of an entire collection, formed earlier by an individual connoisseur over many years, being acquired by a public museum.

Although there are several impressive museums with antiquities in the American West, only two have significant Etruscan collections. The Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, was founded in 1901. Although it is not well-known for its Etruscan material, it has an important archaeological collection that deserves more recognition and study. Like the other museums whose early collections were influenced by the methods of Frothingham, this one too possesses a series of tomb-groups. Many of these, however, were acquired for the museum by Alfred Emerson (1859–1943) in 1902 (Matteucig 1951; Donati 1984). More unexpected still is its extensive collection of votive terracottas, more than 800 examples, part of a huge cache of some 6,000 votives discovered at Cerveteri in December 1885 (see Nagy 1988, which treats 316 examples representing all basic types in the collection). Portions of this find ended up in museums in Boston, Siena, Vatican City, and Berlin; Berkeley also exchanged some duplicates with the Otago Museum in Dunedin, New Zealand.

The Getty Villa of the J. Paul Getty Museum is, at its core, a recreation of the Roman Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum. It opened to the public in 1974 and contained all of the Getty collection from ancient to modern art. Later, when the collection had outgrown this space, all of the art from the Medieval period onward was moved to a new museum at the Getty Center in Brentwood so that the extensively renovated villa could be devoted exclusively to antiquities. It reopened in 2006. The Etruscan collection is especially rich in pottery, amber, carved gems, and gold jewelry.⁶ In 1996 the Getty acquired through donation and purchase approximately 300 antiquities, including several important Etruscan objects, from the Fleischman Collection in New York.⁷

The largest collection of classical antiquities in Canada is in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Founded in 1912 and associated with the University of Toronto until 1968, this is another museum with an Etruscan collection mostly

acquired before 1920. The collection is especially rich in impasto and bucchero pottery, bronze vessels and engraved mirrors.⁸

This brief survey of North American collections demonstrates two basic approaches to the acquisition of Etruscan artifacts: an archaeological approach that emphasizes tomb-groups where all the objects in a given tomb might be presented together, and an aesthetic approach where objects are selected primarily for their artistic quality, their iconographical or technical interest, and their good state of preservation. For example, the Metropolitan's approach was often a combination of these two trends, at least in the early years. The Monteleone di Spoleto tomb-group, acquired in 1903, has impressive archaeological value but, especially when we consider the chariot, it is also a major source of aesthetic, stylistic, iconographical, and technical interests. The fact that it is the most-often cited object in the Etruscan collection demonstrates the validity of this opinion. The museum's two other tomb-groups, from Bolsena (also acquired in 1903) and Civita Castellana (acquired in 1912), also combine archaeological and aesthetic qualities. These tomb-groups and scores of other objects in the various museums mentioned above demonstrate both aesthetic and archaeological significance. They provide a precious glimpse into the vibrant world of the Etruscans in a North American setting.

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NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Del Chiaro 1967; De Puma 1987b; Pieraccini 2000. Etruscan material forms part of several university collections: Sackler Museum, Harvard University; Princeton University Art Museum; Yale University Art Museum; Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), Allen Art Museum, Oberlin College (Oberlin, OH), Indiana University Art Museum (Bloomington, IN); University of Iowa Museum of Art (Iowa City); Chazen Art Museum, University of Wisconsin (Madison); University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology (Columbia), to mention a few. Recently two university antiquities collections have published Etruscan material: Bonfante and Fowlkes 2006: 103–132, 144–149; Cavaliere and Udell 2012, 133–241. One should note that at many academic institutions there is a small antiquities collection in the Classics Department.
- 2 The sarcophagi are treated in Haynes 2000: 287–291, figs. 232a–d, 233. They are presently being conserved. Thus far this work has revealed vestiges of painted ornament that had previously escaped detection: Tsu and Segal 2012.
- 3 For example, see Marshall Archives, Part 3, vol. 3, 698 (letter from Robinson to Marshall, December 28, 1907); vol. 6, 1367 (letter of Robinson to Marshall, February 4, 1914). Compare Marshall’s letter to Robinson (vol. 4, 858; February 8, 1909): “... The things [contents of a tomb-group from Tarquinia] were much too archaeological for my taste ...”
- 4 Three of the five *cistae*, all acquired by Henry Walters from the Marcello Massarenti Collection in 1902, are published in Bordenache Battaglia 1979: 42–47, pls. XLIII–LV; the mirrors have not yet appeared in the *CSE*; the jewelry, most acquired by Walters in 1927, is treated by Buitron 1979: 53–71.

- 5 Much of the jewelry, all acquired by 1912, has appeared in De Puma 1987a and 1996a. Two of the painted sarcophagi, acquired from Alessandro Jandolo in Rome in 1901–1902, and a third purchased c.1912, are published in Tarbell and Laufer 1917. Some of the painted decoration is modern: see Baglione 1991.
- 6 The bucchero and painted pottery are treated in De Puma 1996b and 2000. For a selection of the extensive amber collection, see Causey 2012 and the accompanying website: museumcatalogues.getty.edu/amber. The carved gems are included in Spier 1992.
- 7 Most of these appear in an earlier exhibition catalogue: True and Hamma 1994: 154–197 (“Etruria”), with entries by S. Haynes, A. Herrmann, K. Hamma, and J. R. Guy. Recently some of these objects were returned to Italy and are now at the Villa Giulia in Rome.
- 8 Hayes 1975. Hayes has published useful catalogues: Hayes 1984 and 1985. The fine collection of 36 engraved mirrors has not yet been published in the *CSE*; however, a few have been briefly treated by Baglione 1976: nos. 3–6, 11. Almost all of the mirrors can be traced back to the Giosafat Bazzichelli Collection in Viterbo, and most seem to have come from sites in that area.

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Scaevola, Gaius Mucius

scarabs

Scarceta

sculpture *see also* [portraits](#); [reliefs](#); [statues](#); [statuettes](#)

seafaring *see also* [trade](#)

Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa

Semla/Semele

Seven Against Thebes

shipwrecks

Sicily

silver

skeletal remains

slavery

social

- class

- hierarchy

- organization

- status

- structure

Sostratos

Sovana

spectacles

Spina

sports

statues

- “*Arringatore*” (Avle Metelis)

- “Brutus,”

- Cannicella statue

- “Cowboy” statues

- Terracotta “warriors,”

statuettes

Strabo

sulcus primigenius

Śuri *see* [Aplu](#)

survey

- geophysical

- surface

Sutrium/Sutri

synoecism

Syria

swords

Tabula Capuana

Tabula Cortonensis

Tages

Talamone

talisman *see also* [amulets](#)

Tanaquil *see also* [textiles](#); [women](#)

Tarchon

Tarquinia/Tarquinius

Tarquinius Superbus

technology

temenos

temples

templum

terracotta

textiles

Thalna

Thanr

Thefarie Velianas

Theopompus of Chios

Thesan/Eos

Theseus

Thethis/Thetis

thymiaterion

Tinia/Jupiter

tintinnabulum

Todi

toga

Tolfa mountains

tombs *see also* [paintings](#); [sculpture](#); [urns](#)

aedicula type

Bernardini Tomb (Palestrina)

Bokharis Tomb (Tarquinia)

Bruschi tomb (Tarquinia)

Campana I tomb (Caere)

Campana Tomb (Veii)

chamber type

Circolo di Bes (Vetulonia)

“cube” type (*tomba a dado*)

Curunas family tomb (Tuscania)

dromos

fossa

François Tomb (Vulci)

Giglioli Tomb (Tarquinia)

Golini I Tomb (Orvieto)

house type

Ildebranda/Hildebrand Tomb (Sovana)

Ipogeo della Medusa (Arpi)

klinai

looting of

Mengarelli Tomb (Cerveteri)

Monteleone di Spoleto tomb-group

Partunu Tomb (Tarquinia)

porticus type

pozzo

“princely” tombs (*tomba principesca*)

Querciola Tomb II (Tarquinia)

Regolini-Galassi tomb (Caere)

rock-cut tombs (Southern Etruria)

Sorbo tomb (Caere)

sottofacciata rooms

Tanella di Pitagora (Cortona)

Tarquinia

Tassinai Tomb (Chiusi)

tholos type

Tomb 1 (Poggio Aguzzo, Murlo)

Tomb 4 (Poggio Aguzzo, Murlo)

Tomb 5 (Arsenale Militare, Bologna)

Tomb 89 (Verucchio)

Tomb 136 (Veii)

Tomb 871 (Veii)

Tomb 5636 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 5967 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 6070 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 6095 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 6262 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 6272 (Tarquinia)

Tomb 6276 (Tarquinia)

Tomba dei Flabelli Bronzi (Populonia)

Tomb of Dogtooth Frieze (Caere)

Tomb of Hunting and Fishing (Tarquinia)

Tomb of Lars Porsenna (Chiusi)

Tomb of Orcus I (Tarquinia)

Tomb of Orcus II (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Alethna (Musarna)

Tomb of the Alsina (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Anina Family (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Augurs (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Baron (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Blue Demons (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Bulls (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Cardarelli (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Cardinal (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Charuns (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Demons (Cerveteri)
Tomb of the Diver (Paestum)
Tomb of the Five Chairs (Caere)
Tomb of the Funeral Bed (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Hescanas (Orvieto)
Tomb of the Hunter (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Hut (Caere)
Tomb of the Inscriptions (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Inscriptions (Vulci)
Tomb of the Jade Lions (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Jugglers (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Lionesses (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Meeting (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Mercareccia (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Monkey (Chiusi)
Tomb of the Olympiads/Olympic Games (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Painted Animals 1 (Caere)
Tomb of the Painted Tile (Caere)
Tomb of the Panther (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Pygmies (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Shields (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Shields and Chairs/Seats (Caere)
Tomb of the Ship (Tarquinia)
Tomb of the Sphinx (Vulci)
Tomb of the Statues (Ceri)
Tomb of the Sun and Moon (Vulci)
Tomb of the Treptie (Tuscania)
Tomb of the Triclinium (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Typhon (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Whipping (Tarquinia)

Tomb of the Winged Demons (Sovana)

Tumulo del Sodo II (Cortona)

Vipinana family tomb (Tuscania)

“Warrior princess” tomb (Tarquinia)

tombaroli *see also* [looting](#)

trabea

trade

Tragliatella pitcher

tripods

Troilos

Trojan war

“*Truia*” game

Tuchulcha

tular

tumulus

Turan/Aphrodite

Turms/Hermes

Tuscania

Tute/Tydeus

Tyrrhenian

Tyrrhenian amphorae

Tyrrhenian coast/sea

Tyrrhenians

Umbria

Umbrian

underworld

Uni/Hera/Juno

urbanism

urbanization *see* [Etruria](#)

urns

Urusthe/Orestes

Uthuze/Uthste/Odysseus

Valerius Maximus

Vanth

vase painters

Achilles Painter

Aristonothos

Eagle Painter

The Micali Painter

Penthesilea Painter

Sosias Painter *see also* [Euphronios](#); [Exekias](#); [Onesimos](#)

vases

Veii

Vel Saties

Veltune

Verrius Flaccus

Vetulonia

Vibenna brothers

Vignaccia

Villanovan period *see* [Etruria](#)

violence

Virgil

Viterbo

Vitruvius

Volsinii *see* [Orvieto](#)

Volterra

Voltumna

votives

Vulca

Vulci

warfare

warriors

wealth

weapons

weaving

wedding

wine

women

wool

zilath

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